

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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The U.S. Department of State’s mission is to bilaterally, multilaterally, and regionally implement the President’s foreign policy priorities; to serve U.S. citizens abroad; and to advance the economic, foreign policy, and national security interests of the United States.

Since the U.S. Founding, the Department of State has been the American government’s designated tool of engagement with foreign governments and peoples throughout the world. Country names, borders, leaders, technology, and people have changed in the more than two centuries since the Founding, but the basics of diplomacy remain the same. Although the Department has also evolved throughout the years, at least in the modern era, there is one significant problem that the next President must address to be successful.

There are scores of fine diplomats who serve the President’s agenda, often helping to shape and interpret that agenda. At the same time, however, in all Administrations, there is a tug-of-war between Presidents and bureaucracies—and that resistance is much starker under conservative Presidents, due largely to the fact that large swaths of the State Department’s workforce are left-wing and predisposed to disagree with a conservative President’s policy agenda and vision.

It should not and cannot be this way: The American people need and deserve a diplomatic machine fully focused on the national interest as defined through the election of a President who sets the domestic and international agenda for the nation. The next Administration must take swift and decisive steps to reforge the department into a lean and functional diplomatic machine that serves the

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President and, thereby, the American people. Below is the basic but essential road-map for achieving these repairs.

HISTORY AND CONTEXT

Founded in 1789, the Department of State was one of the first Cabinet-level agencies in the new American government. The first Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson, oversaw a small staff, diplomatic posts in London and Paris, and 10 consular posts.¹ Today, the Department of State has almost 80,000 total employees (including 13,517 foreign service employees and 11,683 civil service employees) in 275 embassies, consulates, and other posts around the world.²

In theory, the State Department is the principal agency responsible for carrying out the President's foreign policy and representing the United States in other nations and international organizations. To the extent consistent with presidential policy and federal law, the department also supports U.S. citizens and businesses in other nations and vets foreign nationals seeking temporary or permanent entrance to the United States. The State Department also provides humanitarian, security, and other assistance to non-U.S. populations in need, and otherwise advances and supports U.S. national interests abroad. Properly led, the State Department can be instrumental for communicating and implementing a foreign policy vision that best serves American citizens.

As the U.S. Commission on National Security/21st Century (the Hart–Rudman Commission) observed more than 20 years ago, the State Department is a “crippled institution” suffering from “an ineffective organizational structure in which regional and functional policies do not serve integrated goals, and in which sound management, accountability, and leadership are lacking.”³ Unfortunately, this critique remains accurate.

The State Department's failures are not due to a lack of resources. As one expert has observed, the department “has significantly more at its disposal than was the case at the end of the Cold War, in the mid-1990s, and at the height of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.”⁴ A major source, if not *the* major source, of the State Department's ineffectiveness lies in its institutional belief that it is an independent institution that knows what is best for the United States, sets its own foreign policy, and does not need direction from an elected President.

The next President can make the State Department more effective by providing a clear foreign policy vision, selecting political officials and career diplomats that will enthusiastically turn that vision into a policy agenda, and firmly supporting the State Department as it makes the necessary institutional adjustments.

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND BUREAUCRATIC LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT

Focusing the State Department on the needs and goals of the next President will require the President's handpicked political leadership—as well as foreign

service and civil service personnel who share the President’s vision and policy agendas—to run the department. This can be done by taking these steps at the outset of the next Administration.

Exert Leverage During the Confirmation Process. Notwithstanding the challenges and slowness of the modern U.S. Senate confirmation process, the next President can exert leverage on the Senate if he or she is willing to place State Department appointees directly into those roles, pending confirmation. Doing so would both ensure that the department has immediate senior political leadership and would force the Senate to act on nominees’ appointments instead of being allowed to engage in dilatory tactics that cripple the State Department’s functionality for weeks, months, or even years.

Assert Leadership in the Appointment Process. The next Administration should assert leadership over, and guidance to, the State Department by placing political appointees in positions that do not require Senate confirmation, including senior advisors, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretaries, and Deputy Assistant Secretaries. Given the department’s size, the next Administration should also increase the number of political appointees to manage it.

To the extent possible, all non-confirmed senior appointees should be selected by the President-elect’s transition team or the new President’s Office of Presidential Personnel (depending on the timing of selection) and be in place the first day of the Administration. No one in a leadership position on the morning of January 20 should hold that position at the end of the day. These recommendations do not imply that foreign service and civil service officials should be excluded from key roles: It is hard to imagine a scenario in which they are not immediately relevant to the transition of power. The main suggestion here is that as many political appointees as possible should be in place at the start of a new Administration.

Support and Train Political Appointees. The Secretary of State should use his or her office and its resources to ensure regular coordination among all political appointees, which should take the form of strategy meetings, trainings, and other events. The secretary should also take reasonable steps to ensure that the State Department’s political appointees are connected to other departments’ political appointees, which is critical for cross-agency effectiveness and morale. The secretary should capitalize on the more experienced political appointees by using them as the foundation for a mentorship program for less experienced political appointees. The interaction of political appointees must be routine and operational rather than incidental or occasional, and it must be treated as a crucial dimension for the next Administration’s success.

Maximize the Value of Career Officials. Career foreign service and civil service personnel can and must be leveraged for their expertise and commitment to the President’s mission. Indeed, the State Department has thousands of employees with unparalleled linguistic, cultural, policy, and administrative skills,

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and large numbers of them have been an enormous resource to the Secretaries of State under which they have served. The secretary must find a way to make clear to career officials that despite prior history and modes of operation, they need not be adversaries of a conservative President, Secretary of State, or the team of political appointees.

Reboot Ambassadors Worldwide. All ambassadors are required to submit letters of resignation at the start of a new Administration. Previous Republican Administrations have accepted the resignations of only the political ambassadors and allowed the foreign service ambassadors to retain their posts, sometimes for months or years into a new Administration.⁵ The next Administration must go further: It should both accept the resignations of all political ambassadors and quickly review and reassess all career ambassadors. This review should commence well before the new Administration's first day.

Ambassadors in countries where U.S. policy or posture would substantially change under the new Administration, as well as any who have evinced hostility toward the incoming Administration or its agenda, should be recalled immediately. The priority should be to put in place new ambassadors who support the President's agenda among political appointees, foreign service officers, and civil service personnel, with no predetermined percentage among these categories. Political ambassadors with strong personal relationships with the President should be prioritized for key strategic posts such as Australia, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United Nations, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

RIGHTING THE SHIP

Ensuring the State Department is accountable for serving American citizens first will require—at a minimum—that the following steps be implemented immediately:

Review Retroactively. Before inauguration, the President-elect's department transition team should assess every aspect of State Department negotiations and funding commitments. Upon inauguration, the Secretary of State should order an immediate freeze on *all* efforts to implement unratified treaties and international agreements, allocation of resources, foreign assistance disbursements, domestic and international contracts and payments, hiring and recruiting decisions, etc., pending a political appointee-driven review to ensure that such efforts comport with the new Administration's policies. The quality of this review is more important than speed. The posture of the department during this review should be an unwavering desire to prioritize the American people—including a recognition that the federal government must be a diligent steward of taxpayer dollars.

Implement Repair. The State Department must change its handling of international agreements to restore constitutional governance. Under prior Administrations, unnecessary institutional factors in the department caused

numerous logistical challenges in negotiating, approving, and implementing treaties and agreements. This is particularly true under the Biden Administration. For example, under the Biden Administration, the State Department was considered sufficiently unreliable in terms of alignment and effectiveness such that its political leadership invoked its Circular 175 (C-175) authority to delegate its diplomatic capacity to other agencies such as the Department of Homeland Security.

At time of publication, the State Department is negotiating (or seeking to negotiate) large-scale, sovereignty-eroding agreements that could come at considerable economic and other costs to the American people. Although such agreements should be evaluated and approved as are treaties, the Biden Administration is likely to simply call them “agreements.” The Biden State Department not only approves but also enforces treaties that have not been ratified by the U.S. Senate. This practice must be thoroughly reviewed—and most likely jettisoned.

The next President should recalibrate how the State Department handles treaties and agreements, primarily by restoring constitutionality to these processes. He or she should direct the Secretary of State to freeze any ongoing treaty or international agreement negotiations and assess whether those efforts align with the new President’s foreign policy direction. The next Administration should also direct the secretary to order an immediate stand-down on enforcement of any treaties that have not been ratified by the Senate, and order a thorough review of the degree to which such enforcement has impacted the department’s functions, policies, and use of resources.

The Secretary of State, in cooperation with the Office of the Attorney General and the White House Counsel’s Office, should also conduct a review to identify “agreements” that are really treaty commitments within the ordinary public meaning of the Constitution,⁶ and suspend compliance pending presidential transmittal of those agreements to the Senate for advice and consent. The next Administration should also move to withdraw from treaties that have been under Senate consideration for 20 years or more, with the understanding that those treaties are unlikely to be ratified. Under circumstances in which ratification of a stale treaty before the Senate still serves national interests, the treaty letter of transmittal and submission should be updated for current circumstances. The Secretary of State must revoke most outstanding C-175 authorities that have been granted to other agencies during previous Administrations, although such revocations should be closely coordinated with the White House for logistical reasons.

Coordinate with Other Agencies. Interagency engagement in this new environment must be similarly adjusted to mirror presidential direction. Indeed, coordination among federal agencies is challenging even in the most well-oiled Administrations. Although such coordination is inescapable and sometimes productive, agencies tend to leverage each other’s resources in ways that occasionally have off-mission consequences for the agency or agencies with the resources. Ideally, the

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Secretary of State should work as part of an agile foreign policy team along with the National Security Advisor, the Secretary of Defense, and other agency heads to flesh out and advance the President's foreign policy. Bureaucratic stovepipes of the past should be less important than commitment to, and achievement of, the President's foreign policy agenda. The State Department's role in these interagency discussions must reflect the President's clear direction and disallow resources and tools to be used in any way that detracts from the presidentially directed mission.

Coordinate with Congress. Congress has both the statutory and appropriations authority to impact the State Department's operations and has a strong interest in key aspects of American foreign policy. The department must therefore take particular care in its interaction with Congress, since poor interactions with Congress, regardless of intentions, could trigger congressional pushback or have other negative impacts on the President's agenda.

This will require particularly strong leadership of the Department of State's Bureau of Legislative Affairs. The Secretary of State and political leadership should ensure full coordination with the White House regarding congressional engagement on any State Department responsibility. This may lead to, for example, the President authorizing the State Department to engage with Members of Congress and relevant committees on certain issues (including statutorily designated congressional consultations), but to remain "radio silent" on volatile or designated issues on which the White House wants to be the primary or only voice. All such authorized department engagements with Congress must be driven and handled by political appointees in conjunction with career officials who have the relevant expertise and are willing to work in concert with the President's political appointees on particularly sensitive matters.

Respond Vigorously to the Chinese Threat. The State Department recently opened the Office of China Coordination, or "China House." This office is intended to bring together experts inside and outside the State Department to coordinate U.S. government relations with China "and advance our vision for an open, inclusive international system."⁷ Whether China House will streamline U.S. government communication, consensus, and action on China policy—given the presence of other agencies with strong competing or adverse interests—remains to be seen. The unit is dependent on adequate and competent staff being assigned by other bureaus within the State Department.

Nonetheless, the concept is one a Republican Administration should support *mutatis mutandis*. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has been "at war" with the U.S. for decades. Now that this reality has been accepted throughout the government, the State Department must be prepared to lead the U.S. diplomatic effort accordingly. The centralization of efforts in one place is critical to this end.

Review Immigration and Domestic Security Requirements. Arguably, the department's most noteworthy challenge on the global stage has been its handling

of immigration and domestic security issues, which are inextricably related. The State Department's apparent posture toward these two issues, which are of paramount importance to the American people, has historically been that they are of lesser importance than other issues and that they can be treated as concessions in broader diplomatic engagements. In other instances in which access to the U.S. in the form of immigrant (permanent) and nonimmigrant (temporary) visas could potentially serve as diplomatic leverage, it is almost never used. To some degree, the State Department and many of its personnel appear to view the U.S. immigration system less as a tool for strengthening the United States and more as a global welfare program.

To ensure the safety, security, and prosperity of all Americans, this must change. Below are several key areas in which the department's formal and informal postures must adjust to reflect the current immigration and domestic security environment:

- **Visa reciprocity.** The United States should strictly enforce the doctrine of reciprocity when issuing visas to all foreign nationals. For too long, the U.S. has provided virtually unfettered access to foreign nationals from countries that do not respond in kind—including countries that are actively hostile to U.S. interests and nationals. Mandatory reciprocity will convey the necessary reality that other countries do not have an unfettered right to U.S. access and must reciprocally offer favorable visa-based access to U.S. nationals. The State Department's reaction time to other countries' changes in visa policies with respect to the U.S. must be streamlined to ensure it can be updated in real time.
- **Section 243(d) visa sanctions.** Visa sanctions under section 243(d) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA),⁸ enacted into law to motivate countries to accept the return of any nationals who have been ordered removed from the U.S., should be quickly and fully enforced. Recalcitrant countries that do not accept receipt of their returned nationals will risk the suspension of issuance of *all* immigrant visas, *all* nonimmigrant visas, or *all* visas. These country-specific sanctions should remain in place until the sanctioned country accepts the return of all its removal-pending nationals and formally commits to future, regular acceptance of its nationals. Black-letter implementation of this law will demonstrate a heretofore lacking seriousness to the international community that other nations must respect U.S. immigration laws and work with federal authorities to accept returning nationals—or lose access to the United States.
- **Rightsizing refugee admissions.** The Biden Administration has engineered what is nothing short of a collapse of U.S. border security and

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interior immigration enforcement. This Administration’s humanitarian crisis—which is arguably the greatest humanitarian crisis in the modern era, one which has harmed Americans and foreign nationals alike—will take many years and billions of dollars to fully address. One casualty of the Biden Administration’s behavior will be the current form of the U.S. Refugee Admission Program (USRAP).

The federal government’s obligation to shift national security–essential screening and vetting resources to the forged border crisis will necessitate an indefinite curtailment of the number of USRAP refugee admissions. The State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, which administers USRAP, must shift its resources to challenges stemming from the current immigration situation until the crisis can be contained and refugee-focused screening and vetting capacity can reasonably be restored.

- **Strengthening bilateral and multilateral immigration-focused agreements.** Restoration of both domestic security and the integrity of the U.S. immigration system should start with rapid reactivation of several key initiatives in effect at the conclusion of the Trump Administration. Reimplementation of the Remain in Mexico policy, safe third-country agreements, and other measures to address the influx of non-Mexican asylum applicants at the United States–Mexico border must be Day One priorities. Although the State Department must rein in the C-175 authorities of other agencies, the Department of Homeland Security should retain (or regain) C-175 authorities for negotiating bilateral and multilateral security agreements.
- **Evaluation of national security–vulnerable visa programs.** To protect the American people, the State Department, in coordination with the White House and other security-focused agencies, should evaluate several key security-sensitive visa programs that it manages. Key programs include, but should not be limited to, the Diversity Visa program, the F (student) visa program, and J (exchange visitor) visa program. The State Department’s evaluation must ensure that these programs are not only consistent with White House immigration policy, but also align with its national security obligations and resource limitations.

PIVOTING ABROAD

Personnel and management adjustments are crucial preludes to refocus the State Department’s mission, which is implementing the President’s foreign policy agenda and, in so doing, ensuring that the interests of American citizens are given

priority. That said, the next President must significantly reorient the U.S. government's posture toward friends and adversaries alike—which will include much more honest assessments about who are friends and who are not. This reorientation could represent the most significant shift in core foreign policy principles and corresponding action since the end of the Cold War.

Although not every country or issue area can be discussed in this chapter, below are examples of several areas in which a shift in U.S. foreign policy is not only important, but arguably existential. The point is not to assert that everyone in the evolving conservative movement, or, in some cases, the growing bipartisan consensus, will agree with the details of this assessment. Rather, what is presented below demonstrates the urgency of these issues and provides a general roadmap for analysis.

In a world on fire, a handful of nations require heightened attention. Some represent existential threats to the safety and security of the American people; others threaten to hurt the U.S. economy; and others are wild cards, whose full threat scope is unknown but nevertheless unsettling. The five countries on which the next Administration should focus its attention and energy are China, Iran, Venezuela, Russia, and North Korea.

The People's Republic of China

The designs of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Chinese Communist Party, which runs the PRC, are serious and dangerous.⁹ This tyrannical country with a population of more than 1 billion people has the vision, resources, and patience to achieve its objectives. Protecting the United States from the PRC's designs requires an unambiguous offensive-defensive mix, including protecting American citizens and their interests, as well as U.S. allies, from PRC attacks and abuse that undermine U.S. competitiveness, security, and prosperity.

The United States must have a cost-imposing strategic response to make Beijing's aggression unaffordable, even as the American economy and U.S. power grow. This stance will require real, sustained, near-unprecedented U.S. growth; stronger partnerships; synchronized economic and security policies; and American energy independence—but above all, it will require a very honest perspective about the nature and designs of the PRC as more of a threat than a competitor.¹⁰ The next President should use the State Department and its array of resources to reassess and lead this effort, just as it did during the Cold War. The U.S. government needs an Article X for China,¹¹ and it should be a presidential mandate. Along with the National Security Council, the State Department should draft an Article X, which should be a deeply philosophical look at the China challenge.

Many foreign policy professionals and national leaders, both in government and the private sector, are reluctant to take decisive action regarding China. Many are vested in an unshakable faith in the international system and global norms. They are so enamored with them they cannot brook any criticisms or reforms, let alone

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acknowledge their potential for being abused by the PRC. Others refuse to acknowledge Beijing's malign activities and often pass off criticism as conspiracy theories.

For instance, many were quick to dismiss even the possibility that COVID-19 escaped from a Chinese research laboratory. The reality, however, is that the PRC's actions often do sound like conspiracy theories—because they are conspiracies. In addition, some knowingly or not parrot the Communist line: Global leaders including President Joe Biden, have tried to normalize or even laud Chinese behavior. In some cases, these voices, like the global corporate giants BlackRock and Disney, directly benefit from doing business with Beijing.

On the other hand, others acknowledge the dangers posed by the PRC, but believe in a moderating approach to accommodate its rise, a policy of “compete where we must, but cooperate where we can,” including on issues like climate change. This strategy has demonstrably failed.

As with all global struggles with Communist and other tyrannical regimes, the issue should never be with the Chinese people but with the Communist dictatorship that oppresses them and threatens the well-being of nations across the globe.¹² That said, the nature of Chinese power today is the product of history, ideology, and the institutions that have governed China during the course of five millennia, inherited by the present Chinese leaders from the preceding generations of the CCP.¹³ In short, the PRC challenge is rooted in China's strategic culture and not just the Marxism-Leninism of the CCP, meaning that internal culture and civil society will never deliver a more normative nation. The PRC's aggressive behavior can only be curbed through external pressure.

The Islamic Republic of Iran

The ongoing protests in the Islamic Republic of Iran (Iran), which are widely viewed as a new revolution, have shown that the Islamic regime, which has been in power since 1979 when Ayatollah Khomeini became the leader, is at its weakest state in its history and is at odds not only with its own people but also its regional neighbors. Iran is home to a proud and ancient culture, yet its people have struggled to achieve democracy and have had to endure a hostile theocratic regime that vehemently opposes freedom. The time may be right to press harder on the Iranian theocracy, support the Iranian people, and take other steps to draw Iran into the community of free and modern nations.

Unfortunately, the Obama and Biden Administrations have propped up the brutal Islamist theocracy that has hurt the Iranian people and threatened nuclear war. For example, the Obama Administration's 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, commonly referred to as the Iran nuclear deal, gave the Islamic regime a crucial monetary lifeline after the Green Movement protests in 2009, which, while ultimately unsuccessful, did succeed in weakening the regime and showing the world that younger Iranians want freedom.

Instead of pressuring the Iranian theocracy to move toward democracy, the Obama Administration threw the brutal regime an economic lifeline by giving hundreds of billions of dollars to the Iranian government and providing other sanctions relief. This economic relief did not moderate the regime, but emboldened its brutality, its efforts to expand its nuclear weapons programs, and its support for global terrorism. Former President Obama has admitted his lack of support for the Green Movement during his Administration was an error and blamed it on poor advisors—yet those same advisors are involved with the Biden Administration’s insistence on reducing pressure on the theocracy and resurrecting a nuclear deal.

The next Administration should neither preserve nor repeat the mistakes of the Obama and Biden Administrations. The correct future policy for Iran is one that acknowledges that it is in U.S. national security interests, the Iranian people’s human rights interests, and a broader global interest in peace and stability for the Iranian people to have the democratic government they demand. This decision to be free of the country’s abusive leaders must of course be made by the Iranian people, but the United States can utilize its own and others’ economic and diplomatic tools to ease the path toward a free Iran and a renewed relationship with the Iranian people.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Once a model of democracy and a true U.S. ally, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (Venezuela) has all but collapsed under the Communist regimes of the late Hugo Chavez and Nicolas Maduro. In the 24 years since Hugo Chavez was first elected Venezuelan president in 1999, the country has violently cracked down on pro-democracy citizens and organizations, shattered its once oil-rich economy, empowered domestic criminal cartels, and helped fuel a hemispheric refugee crisis.

Venezuela has swung from being one of the most prosperous, if not *the* most prosperous, country in South America to being one of the poorest. Its Communist leadership has also drawn closer to some of the United States’ greatest international foes, including the PRC and Iran, which have long sought a foothold in the Americas. Indeed, Venezuela serves as a reminder of just how fragile democratic institutions that are not maintained can be. To contain Venezuela’s Communism and aid international partners, the next Administration must take important steps to put Venezuela’s Communist abusers on notice while making strides to help the Venezuelan people. The next Administration must work to unite the hemisphere against this significant but underestimated threat in the Southern Hemisphere.

Russia

One issue today that starkly divides conservatives is the Russia–Ukraine conflict. The common ground seems to be recognition that presidential leadership in 2025 must chart the course.

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- One school of conservative thought holds that as Moscow's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine drags on, Russia presents major challenges to U.S. interests, as well as to peace, stability, and the post-Cold War security order in Europe. This viewpoint argues for continued U.S. involvement including military aid, economic aid, and the presence of NATO and U.S. troops if necessary. The end goal of the conflict must be the defeat of Russian President Vladimir Putin and a return to pre-invasion border lines.
- Another school of conservative thought denies that U.S. Ukrainian support is in the national security interest of America at all. Ukraine is not a member of the NATO alliance and is one of the most corrupt nations in the region. European nations directly affected by the conflict should aid in the defense of Ukraine, but the U.S. should not continue its involvement. This viewpoint desires a swift end to the conflict through a negotiated settlement between Ukraine and Russia.
- The tension between these competing positions has given rise to a third approach. This conservative viewpoint eschews both isolationism and interventionism. Rather, each foreign policy decision must first ask the question: What is in the interest of the American people? U.S. military engagement must clearly fall within U.S. interests; be fiscally responsible; and protect American freedom, liberty, and sovereignty, all while recognizing Communist China as the greatest threat to U.S. interests. Thus, with respect to Ukraine, continued U.S. involvement must be fully paid for; limited to military aid (while European allies address Ukraine's economic needs); and have a clearly defined national security strategy that does not risk American lives.

Regardless of viewpoints, all sides agree that Putin's invasion of Ukraine is unjust and that the Ukrainian people have a right to defend their homeland. Furthermore, the conflict has severely weakened Putin's military strength and provided a boost to NATO unity and its importance to European nations.

The next conservative President has a generational opportunity to bring resolution to the foreign policy tensions within the movement and chart a new path forward that recognizes Communist China as the defining threat to U.S. interests in the 21st century.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Peace and stability in Northeast Asia are vital interests of the United States. The Republic of Korea (South Korea) and Japan are critical allies for ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific. They are indispensable military, economic, diplomatic, and technology partners. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North

Korea) must be deterred from military conflict. The United States cannot permit the DPRK to remain a de facto nuclear power with the capacity to threaten the United States or its allies. This interest is both critical to the defense of the American homeland and the future of global nonproliferation. The DPRK must not be permitted to profit from its blatant violations of international commitments or to threaten other nations with nuclear blackmail. Both interests can only be served if the U.S. disallows the DPRK's rogue regime behavior.

OTHER INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENTS

Western Hemisphere

The United States has a vested interest in a relatively united and economically prosperous Western Hemisphere. Nonetheless, the region now has an overwhelming number of socialist or progressive regimes, which are at odds with the freedom and growth-oriented policies of the U.S. and other neighbors and who increasingly pose hemispheric security threats. A new approach is therefore needed, one that simultaneously allows the U.S. to re-posture in its best interests and helps regional partners enter a new century of growth and opportunity.

The following core policies must be part of this new direction:

- **A “sovereign Mexico” policy.** Mexico is currently a national security disaster. Bluntly stated, Mexico can no longer qualify as a first-world nation; it has functionally lost its sovereignty to muscular criminal cartels that effectively run the country. The current dynamic is not good for either U.S. citizens or Mexicans, and the perfect storm created by this cartel state has negative effects that are damaging the entire hemisphere. The next Administration must both adopt a posture that calls for a fully sovereign Mexico and take all steps at its disposal to support that result in as rapid a fashion as possible.
- **A fentanyl-free frontier.** The same cartels that parasitically run Mexico are also working with the PRC to fuel the largest drug crisis in the history of North America. These Mexican cartels are working closely with Chinese fentanyl precursor chemical manufacturers, importing those precursor chemicals into Mexico, manufacturing fentanyl on Mexican soil, and shipping it into the United States and elsewhere. The highly potent narcotic is having an unprecedented lethal impact on the American citizenry. The next Administration must leverage its new insistence on a sovereign Mexico and work with other Western Hemisphere partners to halt the fentanyl crisis and put a decisive end to this unprecedented public health threat.

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- **A hemisphere-centered approach to industry and energy.** The next Administration has a golden opportunity to make key economic changes that will not only provide tremendous economic opportunities for Americans but will also serve as an economic boon to the entire Western Hemisphere.

First, the United States must do everything possible, with both resources and messaging, to shift global manufacturing and industry from more distant points around the globe (especially from the increasingly hostile and human rights-abusing PRC) to Central and South American countries. “Re-hemispherizing” manufacturing and industry closer to home will not only eliminate some of the more recent supply-chain issues that damaged the U.S. economy but will also represent a significant economic improvement for parts of the Americas in need of growth and stabilization.

Similarly, the United States must work with Mexico, Canada, and other countries to develop a hemisphere-focused energy policy that will reduce reliance on distant and manipulable sources of fossil fuels, restore the free flow of energy among the hemisphere’s largest producers, and work together to increase energy production, including for nations that are looking for dramatic economic expansion.

- **A “local” approach to security threats.** Western Hemisphere nations, including those in the Caribbean, arguably have stronger cultural and historical ties to the United States than most other countries and regions in the world. Yet Central and South America are moving rapidly into the sphere of anti-American, external state actors, including the PRC, Iran, and Russia. Specific countries in the Americas, such as Venezuela, Colombia, Guyana, and Ecuador, are either increasingly regional security threats in their own rights or are vulnerable to hostile extra-continental powers. The U.S. has an opportunity to lead these democratic neighbors to fight against the external pressure of threats from abroad and address local regional security concerns. This leadership and collaboration must span all tools at the disposal of U.S. allies and partners, including security-focused cooperation.

Middle East and North Africa

The next Administration must re-engage with Middle Eastern and North African nations and not abandon the region. Without U.S. leadership, the region may tumble further into chaos or fall prey to American adversaries. This recommendation requires a multi-dimensional strategy.

2025 Presidential Transition Project

- First, the U.S. must prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear technology and delivery capabilities *and more broadly block Iranian ambitions*. This means, inter alia, reinstating and expanding Trump Administration sanctions; providing security assistance for regional partners; supporting, through public diplomacy and otherwise, freedom-seeking Iranian people in their revolt against the mullahs; and ensuring Israel has both the military means and the political support and flexibility to take what it deems to be appropriate measures to defend itself against the Iranian regime and its regional proxies Hamas, Hezbollah, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.
- Second, the next Administration should build on the Trump Administration’s diplomatic successes by encouraging other Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, to enter the Abraham Accords. Related policies should include reversing, as appropriate, the Biden Administration’s degradation of the long-standing partnership with Saudi Arabia. The Palestinian Authority should be defunded. A further key priority is keeping Türkiye in the Western fold and a NATO ally. This includes a vigorous outreach to Türkiye to dissuade it from “hedging” toward Russia or China, which is likely to require a rethinking of U.S. support for YPG/PKK [People’s Protection Units/Kurdistan Worker’s Party] Kurdish forces, which Ankara believes are an existential threat to its security. For the foreseeable future—and much longer than one new Administration—Middle Eastern oil will play a key role in the world economy. Therefore, the U.S. must continue to support its allies and compete with its economic adversaries, including China. Relations with Saudi Arabia should be strengthened in a way that seriously curtails Chinese influence in Riyadh.
- Third, it is in the U.S. national interest to build a Middle East security pact that includes Israel, Egypt, the Gulf states, and potentially India, as a second “Quad” arrangement. Protecting freedom of navigation in the Gulf and in the Red Sea/Suez Canal is vital to the world economy and therefore to U.S. prosperity as well. In North Africa, security cooperation with European allies, especially France, will be vital to limit growing Islamist threats and the incursion of Russian influence through positionings of the Wagner Group.
- The U.S. cannot neglect a concern for human rights and minority rights, which must be balanced with strategic and security considerations. Special attention must be paid to challenges of religious freedom, especially the status of Middle Eastern Christians and other religious minorities, as well as the human trafficking endemic to the region.

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Sub-Saharan Africa

Africa's importance to U.S. foreign policy and strategic interests is rising and will only continue to grow. Its explosive population growth, large reserves of industry-dependent minerals, proximity to key maritime shipping routes, and its collective diplomatic power ensure the continent's global importance. Yet as Africa's strategic significance has grown, the U.S.'s relative influence there has declined. Terrorist activity on the continent has increased, while America's competitors are making significant gains for their own national interests. The PRC's companies dominate the African supply chain for certain minerals critical to emerging technologies. African nations comprise major country-bloc elements that shield the PRC and Russia from international isolation for their human rights abuses—and African nations staunchly support PRC foreign policy goals on issues such as Hong Kong occupation, South China Seas dispute arbitration, and Taiwan.

The new Administration can correct this strategic failing of existing policy by prioritizing Africa and by undertaking fundamental changes in how the United States works with African nations.

At a bare minimum, the next Administration should:

- **Shift strategic focus from assistance to growth.** Reorient the focus of U.S. overseas development assistance away from stand-alone humanitarian development aid and toward fostering free market systems in African countries by incentivizing and facilitating U.S. private sector engagement in these countries. Development aid alone does little to develop countries and can fuel corruption and violent conflict. While the United States should always be willing to offer emergency and humanitarian relief, both U.S. and African long-term interests are better served by a free market-based, private growth-focused strategy to Africa's economic challenges.
- **Counter malign Chinese activity on the continent.** This should include the development of powerful public diplomacy efforts to counter Chinese influence campaigns with commitments to freedom of speech and the free flow of information; the creation of a template “digital hygiene” program that African countries can access to sanitize and protect their sensitive communications networks from espionage by the PRC and other hostile actors; the recognition of Somaliland statehood as a hedge against the U.S.'s deteriorating position in Djibouti; and a focus on supporting American companies involved in industries important to U.S. national interests or that have a competitive advantage in Africa.
- **Counter the furtherance of terrorism.** African country-based terrorist groups like Boko Haram may currently lack the capability to attack the

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United States, but at least some of them would eventually try if allowed to consolidate their operations and plan such attacks. The immediate threat they pose lies in their abilities and willingness to strike American targets in their regions of operation or to harm U.S. interests in other ways. The U.S. should support capable African military and security operations through the State Department and other federal agencies responsible for granting foreign military education, training, and security assistance.

- **Build a coalition of the cooperative.** Rather than thinning limited federal resources by spreading funds across all countries (including some that are unsupportive or even hostile to the United States,) the next Administration should focus on those countries with which the U.S. can expect a mutually beneficial relationship. After being designated focus countries by the State Department, such nations should receive a full suite of American engagement. That said, the next Administration should still maintain a baseline level of contact even with those countries with which it has less-than-fruitful relationships in order to encourage positive developments and to be in position to seize unexpected diplomatic opportunities as they arise.
- **Focus on core diplomatic activities, and stop promoting policies birthed in the American culture wars.** African nations are particularly (and reasonably) non-receptive to the U.S. social policies such as abortion and pro-LGBT initiatives being imposed on them. The United States should focus on core security, economic, and human rights engagement with African partners and reject the promotion of divisive policies that hurt the deepening of shared goals between the U.S. and its African partners.

Europe

American foreign policy has long benefited from cooperation with the countries of Europe (generally, the EU), and any conservative Administration should build on this resource. Yet the transatlantic relationship is complex, with security, trade, and political dimensions.

First, the Europe, Eurasia, and Russia region is made up of relatively wealthy and technologically advanced societies that should be expected to bear a fair share of both security needs and global security architecture: The United States cannot be expected to provide a defense umbrella for countries unwilling to contribute appropriately. At stake after 2024 will be examining the status of the Wales Pledge of 2 percent of gross domestic product toward defense by NATO members. The new Administration will also want to encourage nations to exceed that pledge.

Second, transatlantic trade is a significant part of the global economy, and it is in the U.S. national interest to amplify it, especially because this means weaning

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Europe of its dependence on China. However, there are also transatlantic trade tensions that disturb the U.S.–EU relationship and that have been evident across Administrations. 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. Outside the EU, trade with the post-Brexit U.K. needs urgent development before London slips back into the orbit of the EU.

Third, in the wake of Brexit, EU foreign policy now takes place without U.K. input, which disadvantages the United States, given that the U.K. has historically been aligned with many U.S. positions. Therefore, U.S. diplomacy must be more attentive to inner-EU developments, while also developing new allies inside the EU—especially the Central European countries on the eastern flank of the EU, which are most vulnerable to Russian aggression.

South and Central Asia

Many key American interests and responsibilities are found in South and Central Asia. Specifically, continuing to advance the bilateral relationship with India to mutual benefit is a crucial objective for U.S. policy. India plays a crucial role in countering the Chinese threat and securing a free and open Indo–Pacific. It is a critical security guarantor for the key routes of air and sea travel linking East and West and an important emerging U.S. economic partner. For instance, the 2019 Department of Defense *Indo–Pacific Strategy Report* noted that the Indian Ocean area “is at the nexus of global trade and commerce, with nearly half of the world’s 90,000 commercial vessels and two thirds of global oil trade traveling through its sea lanes. The region boasts some of the fastest-growing economies on Earth.”¹⁴

Meanwhile, the threat of transnational terrorism remains acute. The humiliating withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan after a 20-year military campaign has created new challenges. It has provided an opportunity to reset the deeply troubled U.S.–Pakistan relationship and reassess U.S. counterterrorism strategy in the region. The long-standing India–Pakistan rivalry and tensions regarding the disputed territory of Kashmir continue to pose risks to regional stability, especially because both countries are nuclear powers.

The State Department’s role in strengthening the regional security and economic framework linking the U.S and India is crucial. In addition, the department has important functional responsibilities in dealing with a range of threats from nuclear proliferation to transnational proliferation. While American statecraft should also seek to improve bilateral relations throughout the region, U.S. policy must be clear-eyed and realistic about the perfidiousness of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the military–political rule in Pakistan. There can be no expectation of normal relations with either.

The priority for statecraft is advancing the U.S.–Indian role as a cornerstone of the Quad, a cooperative framework including the U.S., India, Japan, and Australia. The Quad is comprised of the key nations in coordinating efforts for a free and open Indo–Pacific. It is an overarching group that nests the key U.S. bilateral and trilateral cooperative efforts that facilitate U.S. collaborative efforts across the Indo–Pacific. The State Department should also encourage the “Quad-Plus” concept that allows other regional powers to participate in Quad coordination on issues of mutual interest. Further, the State Department must support an integrated federal effort to deliver a revamped regional strategy for South Asia, as well as leading the execution of key tasks to implement the strategy.¹⁵

The Arctic

Because of Alaska, the U.S. is an Arctic nation. The Arctic is a vast expanse of land and sea rich in resources including fish, minerals, and energy. For example, the region is estimated to contain 90 million barrels of oil and one-quarter of the world’s undiscovered natural gas reserves.¹⁶ The Arctic is lightly populated: Only 4 million people in the world live above the Arctic Circle, with more than half of those living in Russia. Only around 68,000 people in Alaska live above the Arctic Circle.¹⁷ However, the sheer immensity of the Alaskan Arctic means its population density is less than one person per square mile.¹⁸

The United States has several strong interests in the Arctic region. The rate of melting ice during summer months has led to increased interest not only from shipping and tourism sectors, but also from America’s global competitors, who are interested in exploiting the region’s strategic importance and accessing its bounty of natural resources.

In the not-too-distant future, there will be a growing interest in the Arctic from both state and non-state actors alike. China has been open about its interest in the region, primarily as a highway for trade but also for its rich natural resources. While the PRC’s increasing intervention in Arctic affairs is a bit strained because it does not have an Arctic coastline, Russia does—and Russia has made no secret of its view that the Arctic is vital for economic and military reasons. Russia has invested heavily in new and refurbished Arctic bases and cold-weather equipment and capabilities. The north star of U.S. Arctic policy should remain national sovereignty, safeguarded through robust capabilities as well as through diplomatic, economic, and legal attentiveness.

The next Administration should embrace the view that NATO must acknowledge that it is, in part, an Arctic alliance. With the likely accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, every Arctic nation except for Russia will be a NATO member state. NATO has been slow to appreciate that the Arctic is a theater that it must defend, especially considering Russia’s brazen aggression against Ukraine. NATO must develop and implement an Arctic strategy that recognizes the importance of

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the region and ensures that Russian use of Arctic waters and resources does not exceed a reasonable footprint.

The U.S. should unapologetically pursue American interests in the Arctic by promoting economic freedom in the region. Economic freedom spurs prosperity, innovation, respect for the rule of law, jobs, and sustainability. Most important, economic freedom can help to keep the Arctic stable and secure.

The U.S. should work to ensure that shipping lanes in the Arctic remain available to all global commercial traffic and free of onerous fees and burdensome administrative, regulatory, and military requirements. While this should be the next Administration's policy with respect to all countries that might seek to block free-flowing commercial traffic, the next Administration will clearly have to exert substantial attention toward Russia.

Both the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Navy are vital tools to ensure an unmonopolized Arctic. It is imperative that the Navy and Coast Guard continue to expand their fleets, including planned icebreaker acquisitions, to assure Arctic access for the United States and other friendly actors. The remote and harsh conditions of the Arctic also make unmanned system investment and use particularly appealing for providing additional situational awareness, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. The Coast Guard should also consider upgrading facilities, such as its Barrow station, to reinforce its Arctic capabilities and demonstrate a greater commitment to the region.

The People's Republic of China has declared itself a "near-Arctic state," which is an imaginary term non-existent in international discourse. The United States should work with like-minded Arctic nations, including Russia, to raise legitimate concerns about the PRC's so-called Polar Silk-Road ambitions.

Concerning Greenland, the opening of a U.S. consulate in Nuuk is welcome. A formal year-round diplomatic presence is an effective way for the U.S. to better understand local political and economic dynamics. Furthermore, given Greenland's geographic proximity and its rising potential as a commercial and tourist location, the next Administration should pursue policies that enhance economic ties between the U.S. and Greenland.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Defending and protecting the American people and advancing their interests requires the United States to engage in a broad spectrum of bilateral and multilateral relationships, including participating in international organizations. Working with other governments through international organizations like the United Nations (U.N.) can be tremendously useful—but membership in these organizations must always be understood as a means to attain defined goals rather than an end in itself.

Engagement with international organizations is one relatively easy way for the U.S. to defend its interests and to seek to address problems in concert with other

nations, but it is not the only option—and American diplomats should be clear-eyed about international organizations’ strengths and weaknesses. When such institutions act against U.S. interests, the United States must be prepared to take appropriate steps in response, up to and including withdrawal. The manifest failure and corruption of the World Health Organization (WHO) during the COVID-19 pandemic is an example of the danger that international organizations pose to U.S. citizens and interests.

The next Administration must end blind support for international organizations. If an international organization is effective and advances American interests, the United States should support it. If an international organization is ineffective or does not support American interests, the United States should not support it. Those that are effective will still require constant pressure from U.S. officials to ensure that they remain effective. Serious consideration should also be given to withdrawal from organizations that no longer have value, quietly undermine U.S. interests or goals, or disproportionately rely on U.S. financial contributions to survive.

The Trump Administration’s “tough love” approach to international organizations served American interests. For example, the Trump Administration withdrew from, or terminated funding for, the United Nations Human Rights Council, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, and the WHO. The results were redeployment of taxpayer dollars to better uses—and other organizations “getting the message” that the United States will not allow itself and its money to be used to undermine its own interests.

The Biden Administration reversed many of these decisions. Currently, U.S. funding for international organizations is more than \$16 billion in fiscal year 2021—a sharp increase from \$10.8 billion in fiscal year 2015.¹⁹ Millions of American taxpayer dollars go to support policies and initiatives that hurt the United States and American citizens.

The next Administration should direct the Secretary of State to initiate a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of U.S. participation in *all* international organizations. This review should take into account long-standing provisions in federal law that prohibit the use of taxpayer dollars to promote abortion, population control, and terrorist activities, as well as other applicable restrictions on funding for international organizations and agencies with a view to withholding U.S. funds in cases of abuses.

International organizations should not be used to promote radical social policies as if they were human rights priorities. Doing so undermines actual human rights and weakens U.S. credibility abroad. The next Administration should use its voice, influence, votes, and funding in international organizations to promote authentic human rights and respect for sovereignty based on the binding

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international obligations contained in treaties that have been constitutionally ratified by the U.S. government. It must promote a strict text-based interpretation of treaty obligations that does not consider human rights treaties as “living instruments” both within the State Department and within international organizations that receive U.S. funding, including by making respect for sovereignty and authentic human rights a litmus test of personnel decisions and elections processes within international organizations.

The U.S. Commission on Unalienable Human Rights focused on the primacy of civil and political rights in its inaugural report, which remains an important guidepost for bilateral and multilateral engagements on human rights. The commission’s report is a roadmap for revamping and reenergizing U.S. human rights policy and should be the basis for both structural and policy changes throughout the State Department.²⁰ All U.S. multilateral engagements must be reevaluated in light of the work of the commission, and initiatives that promote controversial policies must be halted and rolled back.

It is paramount to create a healthy culture of respect for life, the family, sovereignty, and authentic human rights in international organizations and agencies. To support this goal, the U.S. led an effort during the Trump Administration to forge a consensus among like-minded countries in support of human life, women’s health, support of the family as the basic unit of human society, and defense of national sovereignty. The result was the Geneva Consensus Declaration on Women’s Health and Protection of the Family.²¹ All U.S. foreign policy engagements that were produced and expanded under the Obama and Biden Administrations must be aligned with the Geneva Consensus Declaration and the work of the U.S. Commission on Unalienable Human Rights.

The U.S. government should not and cannot promote or fund abortion in international programs or multilateral organizations. Technically, the United States can prevent its international funding from going toward abortions, but the U.S. will have a greater impact by including like-minded nations and building on the coalition launched through the Geneva Consensus Declaration, with a view to shaping the work of international agencies by functioning as a united front.

The COVID-19 pandemic made it painfully clear that both international organizations—and some countries—are only too willing to trample human rights in the name of public health. For example, the WHO was, and remains, willing to support the suppression of basic human rights, partially because of its close relationship with human rights abusers like the PRC.

The next Administration should unequivocally embrace the premise that humanity and the international community can simultaneously tackle pandemics and other emergent health threats without impeding the rights of people. It must also become a vocal surrogate for people in countries where rights are being suppressed in the name of health. This will likely require greater restrictions on

the supply of federal dollars to the WHO and other health-focused international organizations pending adjustment of their policies.

The United States must return to treating international organizations as vehicles for promoting American interests—or take steps to extract itself from those organizations.

SHAPING THE FUTURE

Development of a grand foreign policy strategy is key to the next Administration's success, but without addressing structural and related issues of the State Department, this strategy will be at risk. The Hart–Rudman Commission called for a significant restructuring of the State Department specifically and foreign assistance programs generally, stating that funding increases could only be justified if there was greater confidence that institutions would use their funding effectively.²² Sadly, the exact opposite has occurred. The State Department has metastasized in structure and resources, but neither the function of the department nor the use of taxpayer dollars has improved. The next Administration can take steps to remedy these deficiencies.

The State Department's greatest problem is certainly not an absence of resources. As noted, the department boasts tens of thousands of employees and billions of dollars of funding—including significant amounts of discretionary funding. It also exists among a broader array of federal agencies that are duplicative, particularly when it comes to the provision of direct and indirect foreign assistance. Realistically, meaningful reform of the State Department will require significant streamlining.

Below are some key structural and operational recommendations that will be essential for the next Administration's success, and which will lay crucial foundations for other necessary reforms.

- **Develop a reorganization strategy.** Despite periodic attempts by previous Administrations (including the Trump Administration) to make more than cosmetic changes to the State Department, its structure has remained largely unchanged since the 20th century.²³ The State Department will better serve future Administrations, regardless of party, if it were to be meaningfully streamlined. The next Administration should develop a complete hypothetical reorganization of the department—one which would tighten accountability to political leadership, reduce overhead, eliminate redundancy, waste fewer taxpayer resources, and recommend additional personnel-related changes for improvement of function. Such reorganization could be creative, but also carefully review specific structure-related problems that have been documented over the years. This reorganization effort would necessarily assess what office closures

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can be carried out with and without congressional approval. Timelines for action on these fronts should be developed accordingly, but speed should be a priority.

- **Consolidate foreign assistance authorities.** Foreign assistance is a critical foreign policy tool that is too often disconnected from the federal government's practice of foreign policy. Bureaucrats spend significant energy resisting the use of non-emergency foreign assistance to leverage positive results for the United States, even though it is a perfectly reasonable proposition. The coordination of foreign assistance dollars is also difficult because the foreign assistance budget and foreign loan issuance authorities are divided across numerous Cabinet departments, smaller agencies, and other offices.

The next Administration should take steps to ensure that future foreign assistance clearly and unambiguously supports the President's foreign policy agenda. For example, the next administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, which is technically subordinate to the State Department, should be authorized to take on the additional role of Director of Foreign Assistance with the rank of Deputy Secretary and oversee all foreign assistance. This role—which existed briefly during the George W. Bush Administration before it was eliminated by the Obama Administration—would empower the dual-hatted official to better align and coordinate with the manifold foreign assistance programs across the federal government. The next Administration should also evaluate whether these multiple sources of foreign assistance are in the national interest and, if not, develop a plan to consolidate foreign assistance authorities.

- **Make public diplomacy and international broadcasting serve American interests.** A key part of U.S. foreign policy is the ability to communicate with not only governments but with the peoples of the world. Indeed, in some ways, communicating directly with the public is more important than communicating with governments, particularly in times of governmental conflict or disagreement. Public diplomacy has historically been, and remains, vital to American foreign policy success. Unfortunately, U.S. public diplomacy, which largely relies on taxpayer-funded international broadcasting outlets, has been deeply ineffective in recent years.

The U.S. government's first foray into international broadcasting started with the Voice of America radio broadcast in 1942, which was intended as

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a tool to communicate directly with the people of Europe during World War II. During the next half-century, America's international broadcasting efforts both expanded and increased in sophistication as the United States shifted out of its "hot" war in Europe and into the Cold War with the Soviet Union. U.S. international broadcasting prowess, and the confident willingness to communicate the correctness of American ideals in the face of global resistance, arguably hit its peak near the conclusion of the Cold War in the late 1980s.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of Soviet and Eastern Bloc Communism, factors including the false appeal of a so-called peace dividend triggered a slide in the U.S. ability to communicate a pro-freedom message to the rest of the world and in its commitment to do so. Ironically, this slide accompanied the rise of the Internet and mobile phone technologies, which arguably facilitated the most significant revolution in human communication since the invention of the printing press.

The United States must reassert its public diplomacy obligations by restoring its international broadcasting infrastructure as part of the broader U.S. foreign policy framework, consolidating broadcasting resources and recommitting to people-focused and pro-freedom messaging and content.

- **Engage in cyber diplomacy.** Cyberspace has become an arena for competition between the U.S. and nations that seek and export digital authoritarianism. Cyberspace protection is critical to national security and deserving of commensurate diplomatic resources. Defined as "the use of diplomatic tools to address issues arising in and through cyberspace," cyber diplomacy is a key part of the U.S. government's toolkit for preventing and addressing cyber threats.²⁴

The model for cyberspace that the U.S. espouses is based on democracy and freedom of information. It is "an open, interoperable, secure, reliable, market-drive, domain that reflects democratic values and protects privacy."²⁵ Russia and China, meanwhile, are authoritarian regimes that use the Internet to limit public opposition and control information. They have created technological tools to enforce dominance over their peoples, and at the U.N. and international organizations dealing with cyberspace, they strive to push standards that assist their totalitarian efforts and undermine Western nations.

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Simultaneously, Russia, China, and lesser adversaries exploit the more open networks of countries like the U.S. to undermine democracy through disinformation and propaganda. They have attempted to influence U.S. elections; enabled or encouraged actors to exploit cyber vulnerabilities to commit theft of real or intellectual property; and have challenged U.S. governmental, military, and critical infrastructure networks with targeted malware.

In short, the cyberspace era has gradually evolved from one of exploration, innovation, and cooperation to one that retains these features but is also marked by aggressive competition and persistent threats. To meet this reality, the State Department must move beyond its traditional model of attempting to establish non-binding, informal world standards of acceptable cyberspace behavior. The State Department should work with allies to establish a clear framework of enforceable norms for actions in cyberspace, moving beyond the voluntary norms of the United Nations Group of Governmental Experts.²⁶

The State Department should also assist the Department of Defense to go “on offence” against adversaries. “Deterrence as a strategic approach has not stemmed the onslaught of cyber aggression below the level of armed conflict.”²⁷ The traditional U.S. defensive approach based on deterrence followed by reaction to crossed “red lines” is no longer effective. Adversaries can evade this strategy through multiple tactical lines of action below the level of armed conflict, and such actions have a cumulative strategic effect. The State Department’s role should be to work with allies and engage with adversaries when necessary to draw clear lines of unacceptable conduct. Global financial infrastructure, nuclear controls, and public health are particularly important areas in which consensus may even be found across ideological lines.

These mission-essential institutional initiatives should be joined with others to establish a presidentially directed and durable U.S. foreign policy.

CONCLUSION

The next conservative President has the opportunity and the duty to restructure the creation and execution of U.S. foreign policy so that it is focused on his or her vision for the nation’s role in the world. The policy ideas and reform recommendations outlined in this chapter provide guidance about how the State Department can contribute to this objective.

In the main, this chapter refocuses attention away from the special interests and social experiments that are used in some quarters to capture U.S. foreign policy.

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The ideas and recommendations herein are premised on the belief that a rigorous adherence to the national interest is the most enduring foundation for U.S. grand strategy in the 21st century.

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