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Strength at Home, Collective Power Abroad

Proposing U.S. Grand Strategy
in the 21st Century

TASK FORCE

The Donald C. Hellmann Task Force Program



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Table of Contents

<i>Introduction: The Domestic Approach to Global Leadership</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Economy</i>	<i>18</i>
Introduction	19
Tackling the Cost of Living Crisis: Addressing Domestic Economy Challenges	27
Domestic Economy Policy Options	41
The Dual Imperative of U.S. Trade	42
U.S. Trade Policy Options	56
Modernizing the U.S. Role in the Global Economy	57
U.S. Role in the Global Economy Policy Options	76
Conclusion	77
<i>Environment</i>	<i>79</i>
Introduction	80
Why the U.S. Needs Sustainable Agricultural Practices	85
U.S. Agriculture Policy Options	100
The Race Towards Clean Energy, a U.S.-China Competition	101
Race Towards Clean Energy Policy Options	118
The Responsibility of the United States in Addressing Climate Change	119
U.S. Climate Change Policy Options	134
Environment Policy Recommendation	135
Conclusion	136
<i>Politics</i>	<i>139</i>
Introduction	140
American Institutions & Polarization	145
American Institutions & Polarization Policy Options	158
Populism: The Issue within the United States' Political Parties	159
Populism Policy Options	173
Human Rights: Foundation for Freedom	174
Human Rights Policy Options	187
Conclusion	188
<i>Security</i>	<i>190</i>
Introduction	191

Climate, China, and Cutting-Edge Technology: 21st Century Military	194
21st Century Military Policy Options	211
Securing the Future Through International Cooperation	212
International Cooperation Policy Recommendations	228
A Digital Solution for Critical Infrastructure	229
Critical Infrastructure Policy Options	240
Conclusion	241
<i>Conclusion</i>	243
<i>Bibliography</i>	247

Executive Summary

In the 21st century, the nature of global threats has shifted dramatically. Traditional concerns, such as war and military conflicts, have evolved into considerably intricate challenges, including those of environmental crises, societal fragmentation, political polarization, cyberwarfare, and economic instability. In response to these threats, this Task Force undertakes a comprehensive analysis of these emerging and progressing threats, evaluates past domestic and international responses, and proposes strategic recommendations on how to approach and address these complex issues within the U.S.

This report dives into the analysis and examination of the principal actors shaping U.S. domestic and international strategy in the contemporary era. Ranging from internal institutions to global organizations, the trajectory of the U.S. grand strategy highly depends on strategic engagement and collaboration. By pursuing these partnerships, the U.S. can reinforce its global leadership while safeguarding national stability and long-term prosperity.

While the United States confronts a wide range of threats, this report focuses on four key domains identified by this Task Force as the most critical to instituting a substantial 21st century grand strategy. The threats delineated in this report are as follows:

I. Economy

The economy is a component driver of most any application or engagement of any state action both domestically and internationally, the U.S. included. It is therefore a monopolistic force that drives the decisions and strategies analyzed throughout the report as a whole. The general dimension of a U.S. grand strategy relies on fortifying domestic infrastructure and reform while also maintaining a proactive stance through interaction within the global market.

This section identifies the key challenges that the U.S. faces from an economic stance, such as those of inflation, labor market instability, housing shortages, and other collective issues which hinder any long-term growth for the country. Any economic stabilization and reform must stem from turning focus towards domestic policies first and addressing these concerns to ensure a stable foundation for any prosperous international engagement. As the current administration has taken an approach towards trade policy through the use of tariffs, it has strained relations with key allies to economic interactions, such as Canada, Mexico, and China. While aiming to reduce deficit, these tariffs risk escalating trade conflicts such as the discussed U.S.-China trade war and may end up destabilizing global supply chains. These events will be analyzed and reflected upon through the lens of why the U.S. should therefore pursue balanced trade agreements and as to why it should promote cooperation while still managing to safeguard its own domestic industries in the process.

While reflecting on this, globalization is to still remain a vital driver for economic growth in the U.S., meaning that there is a necessity of maintaining active participation in multilateral institutions. As the international scene continues to shift with the rise of emerging markets such as those of China, Brazil, and India, the U.S. should adopt a more collaborative approach as opposed to an isolationist one in order to maintain its worldwide influence. By establishing beneficial partnerships which focus on areas of technology, infrastructure, energy, and others, it can sustain and facilitate its global leadership.

As continuous inequality poses a risk to the economic stability of the country and social cohesion, on U.S. soil, this section will additionally focus on why the government should center on federal policies to combat this. There should be development and implementation of policies to narrow this discriminatory gap through investments towards workforce development, creating

affordable housing, education, and many other sectors which are addressed. By working to solve these disparities, it not only enhances the well-being of the domestic economy, but it also reinforces the country's international standing and credibility through its demonstration of applied commitment to their citizens, the values it stands for, and equitable growth. Through having a mindset of applicable advancements and collaboration, the U.S. would be granted a sturdy platform in leadership both domestically and internationally, and this section explores just that.

II. Environment

Climate change is one of the most pressing global challenges of the 21st century, with widespread economic, political, and security implications. As a leading global power and one of the world's largest emitters, the United States holds a critical role in shaping international climate policy. The U.S. has a responsibility to hold itself accountable and work to develop durable policies toward climate action. The U.S. response to the crisis will not only determine domestic resilience but also influence global cooperation, energy markets, and geopolitical stability.

At the time of this report, the Trump administration has reversed numerous climate policies, undermining international agreements and domestic sustainability efforts. On Inauguration Day, President Trump signed an executive order reopening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge—one of the U.S.'s most fragile ecosystems—to oil and gas drilling. His administration's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and rollback of emissions regulations signals a shift away from climate commitments, leaving long-term environmental and diplomatic consequences. Given these challenges, this report examines how progress can continue at the state, local, and private-sector levels, even in the absence of executive support.

This section will evaluate the role of domestic policy in addressing climate change, focusing on energy, agriculture, and international cooperation. By looking at global models and policy frameworks, the report explores how the U.S. can navigate climate action despite political divisions.

As the world transitions to renewable energy, the United States, as the largest emitter of greenhouse gases, must prioritize a shift toward sustainable energy sources. Countries dominating the green energy production and supply chain will gain economic and geopolitical advantages, influencing global markets and international policy. To remain competitive, the U.S. can look to international models who have successfully integrated renewable energy into its infrastructure, such as Germany and China. Investing in domestic clean energy industries would not only strengthen economic security but also reinforce U.S. leadership in international climate action.

Current U.S. agricultural practices present environmental challenges as well as public health risks. Contributing to soil and water pollution, biodiversity loss, and ecological damage, the current agricultural approach must be reevaluated in order to ensure long-term sustainability. As agriculture remains central to the economy, policies must balance sustainability with economic stability. Addressing agricultural challenges is a necessary step towards adapting to climate change in the 21st century.

The U.S. has struggled to maintain a consistent and accountable approach to climate change, largely due to shifting politics across administrations. This inconsistency has undermined its credibility as a global leader in climate action. Without a clear and sustained commitment to reducing emissions and advancing renewable energy, the U.S. risks falling behind in the global energy transition. As other nations take the lead in developing and

controlling renewable energy markets, the U.S. must take decisive action to remain competitive and reinforce its role in international climate action.

III. Politics

When analyzing the state of a nation's power, globally, it is important to understand its political system, standing, and function internally. A country's ability to maintain as primitive a standing as the U.S. does in the world derives from its stability and the domestic political health of its government. This subsection amplifies the need to address political challengers on an internal level in order for the U.S. to sustain and further work towards credible leadership when it comes to promoting democracy abroad.

The following will highlight the importance of recognizing and addressing the weakness of the institutional system that procures from a large wave of current political polarization. Additionally, the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the government, while purposefully constructed to provide checks and balances, have as of recent years faced challenges regarding efficient functionality amidst rising partisanship. This has led to dysfunctionality regarding necessary response approaches to addressing public needs, creating a subsidence of trust in the layout of the democratic practices within the U.S., and even involvement abroad. Acknowledging this, it brings up the urgency of taking actions such as strengthening institutional transparency and accountability in order to restore public trust and ensure the representative values that the U.S. government was setup to apply.

In American society, populism has emerged as a double-edged sword reflecting on the politics and functionality of the democratic system. While originally intended to promote the interests of the people against those in higher standing, it seems to have now morphed into a battleground between the two dominant political parties and ideological extremes. This

polarization has no positive reflection on a solid democracy, instead it fosters increased political aggression, rivalry, and division, all factors which underscore the U.S. system as a whole and are a threat to a stable democracy.

Human rights also serve as a major pillar of a democratic society by ensuring freedom and equality for all citizens, this section addresses just that and the importance of the U.S. as an evolving advocate for them both at home and abroad. As a historical global advocate for human rights and democracy, the U.S. must first address the shortcomings it faces in this area in order to maintain credibility on the international stage. It is important that it strengthens legal frameworks within its own borders and that it promotes civic engagement, which ultimately can safeguard and promote these fundamental rights.

IV. Security

Security will always be a core pillar to the grand strategy of the U.S., fortifying the country's ability to protect itself both physically, its interest, and ensure its involvement both at home and abroad. The U.S. has historically been protected by its geographical placement and has therefore steered clear of any direct threats on its soil, with very few exceptions. This however, as analyzed throughout this section, may quickly change as the nature of the evolving global landscape presents itself as an arena of challenges such as growing power competition, climate-related security risks, cybersecurity threats, and aging infrastructure.

To evade any serious security inflicted implications, the strategy outlines the importance of reinforcing domestic infrastructure and societal cohesion first as it is the fundamental foundation for the then applied international engagements to follow. By ensuring steadfast resilience at home, the U.S. can both project and maintain its stability and leadership on an international scale, while maintaining its security and without overextending its resources.

With this said, it is also equally important to partake in international cooperation as it is essential to addressing contemporary issues regarding security. The U.S. must steer away from consistent unilaterally centered actions and instead embrace a more collaborative security approach with its allies. By strengthening already existing partnerships, such as NATO and regional ones like the Indo-Pacific, and forging imperative ones, ensures a more balanced distribution of defense responsibilities. This would although additionally require slight implications and alterations proposed and applied by U.S. efforts to alleviate the strenuous pressure of its funds and implications in such alliances. The share of power, will however be continuously important as it promotes enhanced collective security worldwide and creates trust among the partners, positively impacting all members.

Additionally, when approaching security, the U.S. military would require the adaptation to the new realities rising at a fast pace, such as climate change and hybrid warfare, for starters. Investments in the technology, tactics and training, and infrastructure are all indispensable developments for maintaining operational effectiveness and for the ability to remain a global leader. Critical infrastructure, especially in the rapidly developing digital realms, demands heightened protection through cybersecurity investments. Military operations and developments require modifications and modernization of current and future technology in order to remain efficient. This all has to be addressed in order to ensure the protection of U.S. citizens and values, and it all also requires cross-sector collaboration. The security of the U.S. all depends on a balanced and adaptable approach which is first and foremost rooted in domestic strength and international collaboration. The U.S. through the fostering of alliances, investing in defense mechanisms and infrastructure, can safeguard its interests and continue to serve as a global power internationally.

In summary, the recommendations outlined in this Task Force report present actionable steps the United States can take to ensure its prosperity in the 21st century and beyond. Strengthening domestic resilience and fostering international collaboration will uphold the nation's global influence while allowing it to adapt and learn from other leading powers.

Introduction: The Domestic Approach to Global Leadership

The United States is one of the world's most powerful nations, and its actions impact manifold countries in both the western and eastern hemispheres. Previously, the United States has often resorted to an ad hoc approach in wielding its enormous global power and influence, with little reference to a strategic blueprint that exceeds the boundaries of any single administration.³ As the United States finds itself at a critical crossroads in its global leadership, this Task Force seeks to provide a mutable answer by developing a national “grand strategy”—a plan for the future of U.S. economic, environmental, political and security relations with the world. The goal is to address the multifarious nature of national challenges in the contemporary era.

Historically, any resemblance of U.S. grand strategy has prioritized setting its eyes overseas in world affairs. Defying tradition, this report examines how strategic shifts in domestic policy today can continue to have a profound impact on the international community while simultaneously improving the situation at home. There is growing consensus that instability—economic, environmental, political, security—is brewing in every theater of the world; the time to exercise strength at home and shared power abroad is now.

Calculated reforms to domestic economic strategy, the U.S.'s role in the climate crisis, American democratic and political institutions, and the nation's dated security infrastructure can reinforce the U.S.'s position as an indispensable global leader. Despite its firm hold on economic

³Adam Garfinkle, "The Silent Death of American Grand Strategy," *American Review*

and military supremacy, the U.S. faces strong pressures both internally and externally.⁴⁵ Within its borders, economic inequality, environmental changes, bipartisan polarization and newfound security vulnerabilities undermine national stability. Internationally, a fragmented geopolitical landscape is reshaping traditional alliance structures and global governance mechanisms.

With the traditional framework for U.S. global engagement receding—predicated upon the unconditional backing of military alliances, advocating economic liberalization and demonstrating diplomatic leadership—the international order is transforming.⁶

Multipolarity has been a steadily rising trend in recent decades, with emerging powers increasingly vying for a redistribution of power.⁷ Given the growing assertiveness of China, the resurgence of regional actors and the escalating scale of transnational threats, the U.S. can no longer ascertain global stability alone.⁸ The international order, once dominated by the west, is shifting to introduce a proliferation of revisionist states while democratic backsliding provokes unrest among key allies and advanced economies.⁹ The continued, eroding authority of multilateral institutions undermine the once unipolar effectiveness of U.S.-led policy.

With the U.S. withdrawing from world organizations like the WHO or the Paris Climate Agreement, there is amplified perception that American global leadership is declining. In light of recent developments, fragility fosters in transnational partnerships like the NATO alliance network or USMCA. Prolonged dysfunction in American politics has led to heightened unrest among the broader international community. Conversely, significant investment efforts made by

⁴ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. “Strategic Change in U.S. Foreign Policy.”

⁵ Columbia Business School. “The Dollar’s Dominance: Military and Financial Power.”

⁶ Wall Street Journal. “*Trump’s Attack on Zelensky Signals New World Order Taking Shape.*”

⁷ Munich Security Conference. “*Munich Security Report 2025: Introduction.*”

⁸ Vision of Humanity. “*The New Cold War: Emergence of Global Competitors.*”

⁹ Freedom House. “*New Report: Global Decline in Democracy Has Accelerated.*”

authoritarian regimes threaten to institute their own spheres of influence; deploying economic statecraft, energy coercion and hybrid warfare, authoritarian national governments challenge American authority in numerous key regions.¹⁰¹¹ While the jeopardization of U.S. foreign interests may hinder American power abroad and impede civil prosperity at home, neglecting internal destabilization is even more dangerous. Without fortification of its domestic foundational blocks, the U.S. cannot prepare itself for the future of an ever-dynamic geopolitical landscape.

Particularly, the rise of non-traditional security threats such as pandemics or cyber warfare highlight the limitations of projecting military power to quell global instability. The weaponization of economic dependencies, mass deployment of disinformation campaigns and the explosive technology race surrounding AI represent just a few of the key drivers blurring the line between traditional warfare and asymmetrical threats. In tandem, the COVID-19 pandemic has drastically widened gaps in wealth inequality, ballooned national debts and inflation, accelerated digitalization and shifted political priorities—conditions that significantly complicate the U.S.’s ability to respond to growing threats.¹²

Economic interdependence—once a stabilizing force of globalization—has recently become a channel for the misuse of strategic leverage. Global supply chain vulnerabilities, critical technologies and resource scarcity are all central to new areas of geopolitical contestation. Global trade today encounters escalated risk conditions from disruptions, inflation and currency shifts. A complex network of trade partnerships restricts the U.S.’s options for

¹⁰Air University. *“Answering Authoritarian State Asymmetric Challenges: Tools for Deterring Hybrid Threats.”*

¹¹ *Wall Street Journal*. *“Autocracies China and Russia Strengthen Their Alliance, Challenging U.S. Leadership.”*

¹² Francisco H. G. Ferreira. *“Inequality and COVID-19: The Illusion of a Level Playing Field.”* Finance & Development, International Monetary Fund

commercial routes, partners and production outputs. Without precise intention or efficacy, policies like nearshoring or onshoring pose real risk to economic implications that may reduce American global competitiveness.¹³ Navigating trade through a political economy lens—supply chains, political tensions and policy changes—is key to ensuring continued economic growth.

Incessantly evolving in sophistication and scale, disinformation campaigns present a unique issue for policymakers who often work with little information and rare attribution to enforce accountability. Unlike physical threats, cyber operations are difficult to trace or attribute as they can come from anywhere or anyone. Recent international forums have sought to agree on a universal definition of disinformation, its practices and legislation but are limited in progress. The pervasive impact cyber campaigns have on American public discourse, free election and overall national security is a cause for major concern; invisible to physical response by force, policy options are predominantly limited to sanctions.

While the booming technological race of the 21st century has yielded mass innovations that present exciting possibilities for the future, it has concurrently created stifling competition environments that put one nation’s brightest minds against the next. Frontier technologies—AI and machine learning, critical infrastructure like telecommunications and renewable energy production—massively sway global leadership in the digital era. AI is particularly impactful to dominating digitalization as its applications affect innumerable adjacent industries, from healthcare to transportation to finance. In today’s context, the core of AI’s function is to improve efficiency, drive innovation and supplement human intelligence. Similar to the nuclear arms race during the Cold War, the technology race in this century exhibits a primary rivalry, this time

¹³ Lazard. “*The Geopolitics of Supply Chains.*”

between the U.S. and China. Currently, no country constitutes larger competition to American technological superiority and development other than China.

Central to the 21st century's geopolitical competition is the contentious relationship between the U.S. and the People's Republic of China (PRC). The PRC has become a defining aspect of U.S. national strategy and navigating this relationship is neither purely adversarial nor unconditionally cooperative—a strained partnership. Nonetheless, Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), continual use of economic statecraft and assertive posture in the Indo-Pacific region pose significant strategic challenges to the U.S. for the foreseeable future. China's BRI has progressively expanded Beijing's economic influence across Asia, Africa and Europe, enabling new forms of diplomatic leverage founded upon strategic dependencies among key regional actors. The rival nation is frequently observed employing economic coercion to challenge cornerstones of American dominance, such as its foreign development projects or trade wars. Its efforts to displace the U.S. in emerging technologies is evident in frontier industries like advanced semiconductors, AI, 5G telecommunications, electric vehicles and green energy. Key Chinese players include Alibaba, Tencent, BYD and more recently DeepSeek. Aggressive posturing in Taiwan and other Southeast Asian neighbors remain at the forefront of military tension between the two rival nations today. Fundamental ideological differences separate the U.S. and China—democracy versus authoritarianism, free enterprise versus state-owned enterprises (SOEs), liberal order versus a multipolar world, and no active grand strategy versus a 100-year plan. For the sake of this report, the PRC is defined as an “strategic competitor” and not a direct adversary.

Grand strategy is best understood as an overarching framework that aligns political objectives with the full range of resources—bridging ends (desired outcomes) to the means

(available capabilities). Clear priorities among competing goals, mobilization over diffused instruments of power and ascertainment of a broader, coherent purpose that expands beyond the changes of any one administration is key to achieving grand success. Unrestricted by military campaigns, a well-devised grand strategy orchestrates everything from alliances and trade to public health and the environment. This grand strategy is about shaping a favorable international environment over the scope of the 21st century, prioritizing long-term strategic thinking over short-term gains. Looking beyond the battlefield or any singular diplomacy room, this report integrates multiple policy domains into a single guiding vision to forge an improved American leadership of tomorrow. And while grand strategy must always consider whether it is truly necessary “all the time”—at the risk of oversimplifying the world and threat inflating—the U.S. must ask itself whether the conditions of today demand a unified vision. Much like the Founding Fathers understood that the Constitution should have the opportunity to change and grow over time, grand strategy should change with the flow of the political landscape.

This report aims to examine the influence of United States domestic policies on an international scale, while accounting for past and current actions that undermine the core values of what the nation seeks to promote. When addressing the way in which a world power such as the U.S. can maintain its status as an international leader, it must first begin by addressing pivotal concerns at home. Through leveraging economic prowess, engaging in environmental forums for change, stabilizing political polarization at home and abroad, and enhancing military infrastructure, the United States will meet the dynamic demands of the 21st century and ensure long-term resilience.

Economy

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Introduction

To address the main tenets of U.S. grand strategy and ensure continuous leadership roles in the international community, this section must first dive into the most pressing issues facing the United States economy from domestic challenges, trade policies, and economic interdependence through the concept of globalization. Each area of focus that is presented throughout, is reflected within current events present in the U.S. federal policies and geopolitical conflict, overall impacting the long-term viability and success of the subsequent proposed policy recommendations. For starters, within the first month and its second term in office, the Trump Administration has made headlines with its range of executive orders such as targeting a top-down overhaul of federal agencies and the domestic economy. While reversing decades of neoliberal trade policies, the Trump Administration is attacking the United States' biggest trading partners by imposing tariffs on necessary partner states, such as Canada, Mexico, and China. The Trump Administration is leveraging tariffs as an "all purpose" tool to extract concessions and reduce the trade deficit, making little distinction between adversaries and allies.¹⁴ These tariffs come with domestic consequences such as price hikes for American consumers, and international implications such as undermining trade treaties and potentially destabilizing the global economy. Looking ahead, the impending trade wars have the potential to worsen internal affairs, such as labor market volatility and undersupplied housing, eventually leading to an extreme rise in commodity prices and weakening any long-term economic growth.

Current implementations such as the Trump Administration's sweeping executive orders regarding the dismantlement of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives and freeze of

¹⁴ Greg Ip, "Trump's Tariffs Usher In New Trade Wars. The Ultimate Goal Remains Unclear"

federal hiring, extends significant socioeconomic impacts on internal economic outcomes. On February 20, 2025, President Trump instituted a memorandum ordering a 90-day freeze on hiring federal civilian employees.¹⁵ This freeze will exacerbate pent-up backlogs in federal agencies, adding additional struggles with work overload and bureaucratic inefficiency. Furthermore, understaffing administrations such as the Federal Aviation Administration, Food and Drug Administration, and Internal Revenue Service could impact vital services that impact everyday civilians, and slow processes that provide social security services to vulnerable communities. These short-term policies gutting federal administrations of adequate workforce and resources will add to market instability, political polarization, and further create negative implications upon local outcomes by impeding equitable access of critical services to many Americans. Additionally, the reflections regarding DEI have reached a level of unprecedented oversight, with federal employees threatened with “adverse consequences” if they fail to snitch on colleagues who refuse orders to purge DEI efforts within their agencies.¹⁶ The clear backlash from the Biden administration’s commitment to racial equity in policy making will fuel populist, anti-immigration sentiment and create a culture of distrust and chaos in federal agencies. The hiring freeze, DEI crackdown, and other attacks on gender inclusion illustrate the rising influence of far-right coalitions in American politics. These trends not only pose significant societal risks, but threaten to upend pillars of equity, inclusion, and accessibility that are key to building a modern, well-functioning American economy in the 21st century.

¹⁵ The White House, “Hiring Freeze”

¹⁶ Erica L. Green and Hamed Aleaziz, “Federal Workers Ordered to Report on Colleagues Over D.E.I. Crackdown,”

Assumptions

The following is heavily reliant on the foundational assumptions that guided the following findings and policy solutions. To begin, the findings urge policymakers to consider domestic economic issues as the key priority preceding multilateral commitments to the global economy. The reality is that the American public is struggling to make ends meet in a cost-of-living crisis, and without alleviating central concerns of rising prices and housing unaffordability, concerns such as the trade war with China and securing critical industries abroad becomes an afterthought. To adequately address macroeconomic, global economic challenges the United States must turn its attention inward and reform domestic infrastructure to better serve the economic needs of its constituents.

While the United States is the global leader in the international system, it must learn to share its economic prowess with emerging markets in rising states. The ascension of China, India, Brazil, South Africa, and others is occurring rapidly and, in many cases, outpacing the U.S. Therefore, policymakers must reform their economic stance to build strong economic links and promote information-sharing in key technological industries to build strong coalitions for the future of the multipolar global economy. In tandem with this forecast, the United States must avoid retreating internally and disengaging from multilateral institutions underpinning the international system. While politicians must address key economic challenges that undermine long-term growth, the United States must re-engage in international economic institutions that promote free trade, development assistance, and robust global supply chains. The U.S. economy won't be the hegemonic economic powerhouse forever, and it must adapt in order to share its resources with emerging states through mutually beneficial treaties and trading arrangements.

Furthermore, a guiding principle of this section is rising income inequality as it is the biggest damper on long-term economic prosperity and must be adequately addressed through concerted federal policies and investment. The following issues of inflation, tariffs, and globalization all contribute unevenly to the national and international economy, with low and middle income individuals bearing the brunt of rising prices amid the affordability crisis. Addressing the wealth gap between the rich and the poor on a domestic level and closing the gap between the Global North and South must be a central part of socioeconomic reform and development policies in the 21st century. Addressing inequality not only improves market performance but helps address entwined social issues such as public health and climate change that pose significant risks to long-term economic resilience.

Lastly, a key forecast is the potential for artificial intelligence to disrupt the global economy and structurally change key industries. The AI revolution will reshape everything from how laborers apply for jobs, how corporations conduct business, and how multinational corporations combat supply chain disruptions. The power of AI to reshuffle the international economy and shape the job market will become increasingly influential in the next couple decades and could render some suggestions or forecasts in this report inaccurate. Digital literacy, cybersecurity, and AI law will play an increasingly important role in regulating technological advancement and determining the future of big tech. Especially in the United States and its preeminence in the AI market, balancing technological progress with automation concerns will be a key priority for policymakers in addressing internal economic problems. Therefore, the following research predictions may shift dramatically depending on the role AI plays in the job market and domestic economy to come.

Section Summaries

The United States' domestic economy faces several challenges from persistent inflation, housing unaffordability, and job market instability that compounds the cost-of-living crisis and undermines efficient trade in the global economy. Persistent inflation in the face of supply chain disruptions and unprecedented tariffs have increased commodity prices, constraining housing supply and squeezing the tight labor market. The impact of high prices and housing unaffordability disproportionately hits lower- and middle-income households hardest, exacerbating socioeconomic inequities such as the wage gap that hinders social mobility. Furthermore, forces such as the Trump administration's federal government overhaul and the AI revolution injected instability in the job market, highlighting a need for updated recruitment practices, workforce development programs, and digital literacy skills in a modern hiring market. Policymakers must begin a concerted effort in coordination with private sector stakeholders to strengthen multilateral trade routes, increase affordable housing supply, and encourage career readiness programs to strengthen domestic infrastructure and mitigate economic instability.

Trade is important in obtaining commodities that domestic industries do not produce or produce small quantities of, and natural resources that are not found in the country's territory. Not manufacturing every single required good for society allows for the specialization in industries with a comparative advantage. Investing in comparative advantage industries increases economic growth however creates a dependency on the exporter countries, introducing a threat to national security. The U.S. must seek to create trade alliances that promote its best interests, through means of strengthening regional trade alliances and resolving the ongoing trade war with China. The U.S. must also secure the safety of its internet-connected imported goods by creating policies and increasing education.

Globalization is a force that intertwines all nations around the world. Nations do not exist in isolation and their behavior affects each other and influences global events. Within the economy, globalization is felt most acutely. Global disruptions can cause issues in the supply chain that can affect commerce on the other side of the world. A push to turn away from globalization has been observed, and following these urges will lead to more economic downturn. The U.S. must be an active participant in the global economy while protecting their domestic interests as well. The U.S. can become a more active participant in exports through the global supply chain, engage in diversification of the economy through economic corridors and, refresh sanction policies so they are more effective. To maintain a presence in the global economy, the U.S. must participate, or they will no longer have as much power. Protecting U.S. dollar supremacy will be of the utmost importance because it is a tangible tool that can be used to protect U.S. economic interests abroad. Globalization is a complicated matter, but being an active participant brings more prosperity and innovation than turning to isolationism and ignoring the global community.

Long-Term Economic Vision

Domestic economic welfare is the heart of the long-term economic vision, which this paper holds. As previously mentioned, without a stable domestic economy, international ventures cannot occur. This paper emphasizes the creation of an economy that works for equality. To achieve this, assets must be redistributed to bridge the wealth gap.

Securing the U.S. dollar hegemony is another main long-term economic goal. Holding the U.S. dollar as the global reserve currency, allows the nation to obtain loans at low cost and accumulate debt without worrying about fluctuating exchange rates.¹⁷ In the domestic economy,

¹⁷ Lahiri, "The Future of Dollar Hegemony"

having the U.S. dollar as a hegemon allows consumers to purchase imported goods at a lower cost.¹⁸ Additionally, the U.S. holds leverage to gain favorable alliances because the majority of global foreign exchange reserves are U.S. dollars.

Regional and bilateral alliances are important to increase national security. Trade alliances, especially free trade agreements, allow countries to specialize in areas they hold a comparative advantage, increasing their domestic economy. Regional trade alliances reduce commodity prices because of the lower transportation costs. Geographical closeness additionally leads to increased supply route security.

Natural resources are a major commodity that is traded between countries. The country that holds the advantage over resources such as EV batteries, solar panels/ renewable energy technologies, and semiconductors can pressure other countries to make unfavorable concessions to receive the resources. To protect itself, the U.S. must start investing in its domestic production for the resources. In account of rare earth minerals that the U.S. does not have, the U.S. needs to seek alliances with multiple countries that supply the resource, rather than depending only on one.

Security measures must be taken into account for the expansion of the Internet of Things. The U.S. needs to create policies to better prepare itself for the speed of technological innovation. One of the major technological revolutions currently occurring is artificial intelligence. AI increases cybersecurity risks, and it is probable to start replacing human jobs. Integrating advanced technology is important for the growth of the U.S., but its population's jobs should not be sacrificed in the process. As new tools arise to decrease the workload, new jobs

¹⁸ Lahiri.

must also be created to guide the tools. New jobs can be created in cybersecurity and AI research and education.

Tackling the Cost of Living Crisis: Addressing Domestic Economy Challenges

Since 1890, the United States has dominated the global system as the world's strongest economy. Boasting world-leading status in high-tech and STEM fields, the United States outpaces powerhouses like China, Germany, and Japan, producing nearly \$30 trillion in nominal GDP, and \$85,370 nominal GDP per capita.¹⁹ Despite these staggering figures, the United States faces an unprecedented cost-of-living crisis which threatens its hegemonic status. Systemic challenges, such as persistent inflation, prohibitive housing, and a volatile labor market expose deep fractures in domestic institutions and exacerbate post-pandemic economic conditions. Each of these challenges must be mitigated through local and federal solutions that address economic inequities and foster long-term economic growth. Ultimately, America's current economic struggles deepen inequality and weaken economic resilience, posing significant risks to the global economy. Solving these issues demands an interdisciplinary approach, addressing structural flaws through interconnected socioeconomic strategies.

Inflation

Compounded by pandemic-era supply disruptions, rising inflation remains a persistent issue, outpacing wage growth and intensifying the cost-of-living crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic followed two years of stable inflation, which surged due to supply chain disruptions and volatile labor markets, resulting in a substantial increase of consumer prices. Consequently, supply chain disruptions and demand-side factors constrained production in key industries,

¹⁹ Investopedia, "The world's top economies"

leading to prolonged supply chain bottlenecks.²⁰ Amid the Russo-Ukrainian War, structural bottlenecks triggered widespread food shortages and skyrocketing energy prices. The pandemic led to unusual distortions in key product markets such as new and used vehicles, creating long-lasting sectoral mismatches between supply and demand.²¹ Supply-side disruptions upended critical enterprises and led firms to improve supply chain resilience. As critical industries face mounting challenges from geopolitical events, updating supply chain technologies will be critical to counter disruptive events.

On the federal side, restrictive monetary policies led to a cooling of inflation rates in 2023, indicating a healthy economic recovery with easing prices and a steady job market. By lowering interest rates, the Federal Reserve increased the cost of borrowing and encouraged saving, stabilizing prices. Despite these policies, the Consumer Price Index increased 0.4% from November to December of 2024, depicting the fastest one-month increase in overall prices since February.²² The recent inflation spike caused skeptics to reconsider fiscal policies and explore alternative strategies to mitigate price instability. In December 2024, the U.S. inflation rate was 2.9%, raising concerns about supply chain bottlenecks, pent-up consumer spending, and housing shortages.²³ With inflation above the Fed target of 2%, rising prices for goods such as food, energy, and housing diminished the purchasing power of Americans and posed significant challenges for policymakers aiming to stabilize price levels. Addressing current inflationary challenges will require economists and politicians to reassess inflation predictions, and harness various socio-economic mechanisms to determine the best course of action.

²⁰ Brookings Institution, “The lagged effects of COVID-19 supply chain disruptions on inflation”

²¹ Blanchard, O.J. & Bernanke, B. S, “What caused the US pandemic-era inflation?”

²² Casselman, “U.S. economy finished the year on strong note, but faces hurdles”

²³ Kiernan, “Inflation edged up in December after rapid cooling most of 2023”

Inflation disproportionately impacts low- and middle-income households, intensifying income inequality as these groups bear the greatest financial burden. For low-income communities living paycheck to paycheck, price hikes reduce disposable income and increase reliance on savings. This is because lower income households reserve a greater portion of their assets in cash such as wages, while upper-income earners earn income from capital gains and entrepreneurial pursuits, making them benefit from rising price levels.²⁴ The failure of fiscal policies to correct inflation exposes structural inequities in the distribution of assets within the overall economy. In fact, rising consumer prices led the Federal Reserve to keep interest rates steady, increasing the toll on low- and middle-income families that rely on credit cards and car loans.²⁵ This disproportionately burdens small businesses and underserved communities, reinforcing generational wealth that determines education, earning potential, and social mobility outcomes. Inflation is a multilayered issue and must be mitigated with detailed policies that address socioeconomic impacts on financial institutions as well as local communities.

Closely tied to inflation's impact on inequality is one of the biggest grievances of Americans: skyrocketing inflation combined with stagnating wage growth. While policymakers expend resources monitoring inflation and facilitating efficient exchange, scant policy reform has addressed slowed wage growth amid the worsening cost-of-living crisis. In fact, wage growth figures adjusted for inflation showed between 1979-2019, inflation-adjusted annual wages for the top 0.1% grew 345% and the top 1% grew 160%, while growth at the 95th percentile grew a mere 63%, illustrating a drastic disparity between the richest 1% and the poorest 95%.²⁶ Inflation

²⁴ Edmond Berisha, Ram Sewak Dubey, and Orkideh Gharehgozli, "Inflation and Income Inequality: Does the Level of Income Inequality Matter?,"

²⁵ Casselman, "U.S. economy finished the year on strong note, but faces hurdles"

²⁶ Luke Petach & Ireland Crowther, "Absentee Ownership and Rental Affordability: Evidence from Commuting Zones"

corrodes market output and strains government resources, entrapping vulnerable workers in devalued wages, rising prices, and limited social mobility.

To adequately address inflation risks, policymakers must adopt a holistic, multidisciplinary approach to mitigate widening inequality and address the cost-of-living crisis. The first step is recognizing how protectionist policies like tariffs and tax cuts for top earners exacerbate inflation, weakening firms' profitability and undermining long-term economic growth. The current Trump Administration's initial plans to levy 25% tariffs on Canada and Mexico and 60% tariff on all imports from China is projected to reduce long-run economic output by 0.4% and increase federal tax revenues by \$3.8 trillion.²⁷ Tariffs ultimately harm consumers, imposing an annual tax increase of \$625 on average households.²⁸ Instead of restricting transnational trade routes, policymakers should pursue strategic trade agreements with key allies to secure low-cost goods and drive down the cost of imports. For one, reviving a US-EU free trade agreement would ease inflation by streamlining trade and increasing supply of in-demand goods, in turn bolstering supply chains and stabilizing prices.²⁹ Expanding economic interdependence in trans-Atlantic trade will promote regulatory harmonization and ensure energy supply security, leading to an increase in wages, GDP, and U.S. exports into new markets.

In evaluating long-term solutions to bring down inflation, developing global trade partnerships must be done in tandem with strengthening U.S. infrastructure and instituting domestic supply side reforms through investment in technology. Updating critical links in global supply chains will be unsuccessful if systemic risks in domestic infrastructure undermine long-

²⁷ York, "Trump Tariffs: Tracking the Economic Impact of the Trump Trade War,"

²⁸ York.

²⁹ Aklin, "Biden Could Reduce Inflation, Mitigate a Recession, and Strengthen Democracy with a New EU-US Trade Agreement,"

term economic resilience. Mike Konczal in testimony before the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability, argued for legislation such as the Inflation Reduction Act which addresses key issues such as building semiconductors, securing green energy, and securing affordable housing.³⁰ At the federal level, congressional investments in technological and physical infrastructure will create new jobs, bolster multilateral trade agreements, and expand self-sufficiency in key technologies. Investing in research and direct development into clean energy and semiconductors will drive innovation, while investment in physical infrastructure through public transportation, housing, and highways will streamline the transfer of goods, support internal economic growth, and incentivize transnational firms to partner with U.S. firms. Creating long-term plans to fund research in critical industries and updating physical infrastructure will stabilize the economy and lower the risks of inflation.

Beyond multilateral trade deals and supply-side reforms, it's critical to implement social welfare policies that address inflation's disproportionate impact on low-income households. By expanding socioeconomic opportunity for all classes, policymakers can increase overall aggregate gains in the economy. One policy is allocating federal funds to expand access to healthcare, housing credits, and unemployment benefits to restore purchasing power for low-income individuals. Similarly, supporting paid parental leave and expanding affordable childcare services could raise labor force participation, a structural threat amid the aging population crisis.³¹ Coupling socioeconomic policies with investment in internal infrastructure will create a healthy job market, improve access to essential services, and reduce income inequality.

Policymakers must undertake a two-pronged approach: reestablishing secure trade routes and

³⁰ Konczal, "Inflation in 2023: Causes, Progress, and Solutions,"

³¹ Jarsulic, "Effective Inflation Control Requires Supply-Side Policy,"

updating domestic infrastructure while reinvesting in social welfare programs to address affordability challenges and promote long-term economic stability.

Housing

A deeply entwined issue with inflation is the lack of affordable housing options for all demographic groups across the United States. The exploding demand for housing outpacing supply especially in urban areas with strict zoning laws led to high prices of available housing units. As a result, home ownership has become an unattainable goal, with many Americans reserving a huge portion of their paycheck for housing. Data reported by the Brookings Institute estimated the current housing shortage ranging from 1.5 to 3 million units, illustrating a nationwide issue lacking concerted policy reform.³² Furthermore, COVID-19 supply chain disruptions hindered the construction of new units, causing a backlog in new developments. In historical perspective, 1.5 million housing units were built annually from 1968 to 2000, while this number dropped to 1.23 million between 2001 and 2020, an 18% decrease.³³ High housing costs exacerbate the job market slowdown and persistent inflation, presenting key challenges for the majority of Americans trying to get by in a cost-of-living crisis.

The housing shortage not only affects other economic indicators but worsens financial instability in poorer households. The National Health Institute cites the pandemic as a catalyst exposing long-standing housing-related discriminatory policies that resulted in communities of color being disproportionately affected by displacement and eviction amid skyrocketing housing prices.³⁴ The pandemic exposed inequities in the distribution, accessibility, and pricing of

³² Patel, Rajan, and Tomeh, “Make It Count: Measuring Our Housing Supply Shortage,”

³³ Patel, Rajan, and Tomeh.

³⁴ Mehdipanah R, “Housing as a Determinant of COVID-19 Inequities”

housing across the United States, with the heightened vulnerability of communities of color facing eviction. This is rooted in historically discriminatory housing practices such as redlining, a federal policy that forced Black and Hispanic residents to reside in neighborhoods with fewer financial resources, scarce community amenities, and higher environmental inflicted risks.³⁵ The effects of segregationist housing policies persist, with communities of color frequently facing cost-burdening rent prices and inadequate social services in their immediate neighborhoods. Policymakers must dismantle systemic processes by expanding resource availability and home ownership opportunities to uplift historically disadvantaged local economies.

The biggest challenge in recognizing the housing crisis is the growing amount of gross income Americans spend on housing. For instance, households spending over 30% of their gross income for rental costs are considered cost burdened, while those spending over 50% are severely cost burdened.³⁶ In 2021, one in six American households were cost burdened, with the poorest 20% of renters accounting for 60% of all households that were severely cost burdened.³⁷ Post-pandemic price hikes on housing and basic commodities amid mass layoffs and labor instability lent highly unequal impacts on living costs. For example, 11 million renter and homeowner households were significantly overdue on average housing payments in December of 2020.³⁸ Further, Black and Hispanic households were twice as likely to report being behind on their payments compared to white households.³⁹ This illustrates the disproportionate impact of

³⁵ Meier and Mitchell, “Tracing the Legacy of Redlining: A New Method for Tracking the Origins of Housing Segregation”

³⁶ Mallach, “The United States Housing Affordability Crisis: No Easy Solutions,”

³⁷ Mallach.

³⁸ Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, “Housing insecurity and the COVID-19 pandemic”

³⁹ Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

the housing crisis on impoverished households, which exacerbates chronic underinvestment in education, social welfare, and public health.

Addressing the current housing crisis requires a reckoning of housing insecurity disparities along racial lines and directing resources into structurally excluded communities. Adopting an intersectional lens is critical, as housing unaffordability is inextricably linked to other systemic issues such as crime and homelessness. Due to past redlining, private loans and investment were steered away from primarily BIPOC communities, hindering equal access to resources. Policymakers should evaluate these issues and funnel subsidies such as low-income housing tax credits to support communities facing housing insecurity. For instance, the Biden-Harris administration allocated \$100 million in grants to help communities create affordable housing, reform land use restrictions, and expedite housing construction permitting.⁴⁰ Enacting proactive solutions at the federal and state levels to expand development in under-resourced localities is crucial to manage inflation and ease tight supply markets.

While federal funds support the distribution of subsidized housing, there must be increased coordination among local governments to address housing shortages. Incentivizing developers to build affordable, mixed-use housing and creating rent-stabilized housing in cities would increase access to affordable units for underserved communities. Utilizing federal grants or levying taxes on top earners could redistribute wealth and expand public housing for at-risk groups such as single mothers, refugees, and unhoused individuals. For example, passing an infrastructure package to renovate public housing is a key priority to revive under-resourced neighborhoods.⁴¹ Updating public housing developments, supporting privatized affordable

⁴⁰ Greenho, “To Fix the Affordable Housing Shortage, Policymakers Should Support Smarter Housing Policies Instead of Using Immigration to Evade Responsibility,”

⁴¹ Huang and Taylor, “Any Federal Infrastructure Package Should Boost Investment in Low-Income Communities”

housing developments, and partnering with local organizations to achieve social justice outcomes will provide stability, affordability, and security in the housing market and uplift struggling communities. Additionally, local legislators can construct county-wide affordable housing units, restrict Airbnb rentals in cities, and undertake zoning reform to promote the development of multi-use housing units. Expanding federal subsidies for housing projects can result in innovative solutions instituted at the local levels, such as reusing abandoned malls and schools into apartments or housing. By tackling housing affordability through federal and local projects, residents can find a wider range of affordable housing options and reach financial stability.

To further address this, the construction of new housing units must be accompanied with robust social spending programs that create local amenities such as greenspaces and grocery stores to expand access to much-needed necessities. Distributing funding to social workers, local community organizations, and food banks will provide essential goods and address socioeconomic inequities, improving the quality of life for local residents. Housing is not an isolated market issue, but a central human necessity impacting all societal issues such as safety, social welfare, and resource availability. Especially for unhoused individuals, the instability of lacking a permanent home impedes job hunting, access to social services, and exacerbates issues of mental health and drug use. Policymakers must invest in affordable public housing along with social welfare to raise living standards and combat housing inflation. By incentivizing private-public partnerships, various stakeholders can fund housing projects and alleviate housing shortages. Solving the housing crisis requires a collaborative approach of community organizations, corporations, and local and federal agencies to expand housing supply and improve quality of life indicators for housing insecure communities.

Labor Market

Exacerbating persistent inflation and housing unaffordability, the American economy faces a slowing job market and labor shortage. The pandemic-era great resignation led over 50 million workers to quit their jobs in 2022, creating prolonged worker shortages in critical industries.⁴² For instance, the food service and hospitality industries struggle to hire workers, while the manufacturing industry faces a shortage of 1.4 million jobs.⁴³ To mitigate wide gaps in the labor market, employers must address systemic grievances such as fair compensation, competitive benefits, and safe working conditions to improve retention and job satisfaction. Although the pandemic shed light on industry problems, the great exodus of workers wasn't precipitated solely by the pandemic. In fact, excessive unemployment, eroded collective bargaining, and corporate-driven globalization have led to a 23.5% decline in median wage growth from 1979 to 2017, illustrating a gap between worker productivity and median compensation.⁴⁴ Employers must improve working conditions, employment terms, and wage growth to account for staggering inflation and rising commodity prices.

Despite historically low unemployment rates, the labor market grapples with opaque hiring practices that negatively impact recruitment and firm productivity. Many issues have been compounded by the shift to skills-based hiring, in which companies offer more opportunities to non-traditional employees without a college degree.⁴⁵ Although these hiring practices expand opportunities to previously stigmatized candidates, further reform is needed to update job requirements and combat degree inflation. For instance, federal reforms include identifying

⁴² Melhorn and Hoover, "Understanding America's Labor Shortage: The Most Impacted Industries,"

⁴³ Melhorn and Hoover.

⁴⁴ Petach and Crowther, "Absentee Ownership and Rental Affordability: Evidence from Commuting Zones"

⁴⁵ Goger, "There's More to Skills-Based Hiring than Just Removing Degree Requirements,"

barriers in internal hiring practices and employing rigorous assessment strategies to prioritize selection quality before cost and need considerations.⁴⁶ Furthermore, HR representatives should improve standardized assessment tools, create targeted recruitment strategies, and increase communication with job applicants to increase transparency in the hiring process.⁴⁷ Hiring managers must avoid relying on proxies over individually assessing a candidate's experience or skills for a specific position.⁴⁸ These trends create hurdles for young graduates entering the job market that confront job postings requiring extensive experience with low starting wages. Conducting careful market analysis to identify which roles benefit from skills-based hiring will create equitable hiring practices, reduce racial disparities in unemployment, and promote economic mobility for early career professionals.

On a separate note, the rapid advancement of technology such as AI has led to a widening skill mismatch, limiting opportunities for career advancement for workers in traditional trade sectors like manufacturing. Due to automation, younger blue-collar workers without college degrees were most likely to have lost their jobs amid the pandemic.⁴⁹ The uneven labor market and the proliferation of AI privileges high-tech workers over lower-wage employees in traditional sectors. The acceleration of artificial intelligence will destabilize job security in key industries and potentially replace tasks in a broad range of low, medium, and high-paying jobs.⁵⁰ Although AI can increase workers productivity, deep machine learning technology poses a

⁴⁶ Reforming Federal Hiring, “Beyond Faster and Cheaper”

⁴⁷ Reforming Federal Hiring.

⁴⁸ Sigelman, M., Fuller, J., Martin, “Skills-Based Hiring: The Long Road from Pronouncements to Practice”

⁴⁹ Tsai, Umucu, and Fish, “Job Automation and Concerns During the COVID-19 Pandemic Among Middle and Low-Income US Adults,”

⁵⁰ Deming, Ong, and Summers, “Technological Disruption in the Labor Market,”

significant threat to all jobs. New and seasoned employees alike must recalibrate their skill sets to cooperate with new AI technologies and remain competitive in the evolving job market.

Examining the technology gap helps uncover historical discrimination undergirding the labor market. The U.S. technology boom came at the expense of traditional jobs less reliant on technology in everyday responsibilities. For example, the rising cost of labor promoted automation at the lower end of the job market through self-checkout machines, increasing labor market tightness.⁵¹ Workers at the lower end of the job market are being priced out and replaced by machines in a technology-dominated economy, making it difficult to find stable employment. Computerized automation has made workers with a college degree more attractive to employers, reducing the value of workers with a high school diploma.⁵² This wage gap disparity exacerbates stagnating wages, high living costs, and housing shortages that burden low earning households. By expanding job market training programs and in-demand skills workshops, left behind workers can gain new credentials and find a stable career path in the modern economy.

Furthermore, the evaluation of systematic disparities in the job market is more prevalent now than ever before. The Trump administration enacted sweeping executive orders cutting DEI programs in federal jobs and voluntary groups, causing major companies such as Amazon and Google gutting DEI policies.⁵³ As a result, minorities such as LGBTQ, immigrant, and disabled employees fear retaliation and prejudice in their working environment. Trump's administration argues that abolishing DEI will restore the United States to a well-functioning meritocracy. As earlier data showed, historical housing laws discriminating on the basis of race and racial wage gaps in the labor market illustrate truths far from a meritocracy. Enacting anti-DEI measures are

⁵¹ Restrepo, "Automation: Theory, Evidence, and Outlook,"

⁵² Deming, Ong, and Summers, "Technological Disruption in the Labor Market,"

⁵³ Yam, "Trump's Anti-DEI Executive Orders Target Employee Resource Groups, Federal Workers Say,"

not only un-American and worsen racial disparities but also undermine long-term measures of economic resilience. Cutting DEI programs hampers a significant source of economic growth as studies show workforce diversity makes companies more competitive, increasing revenue and improving financial stability.⁵⁴ The case for DEI comes from upholding American values of freedom of opportunity and multiculturalism, but for productive benefits that boost innovation and shareholder value. Preserving DEI increases productivity, empowers employees, and drives progress and innovation in the American economy and global market.

To combat these issues, policymakers must modernize the job market, invest in workforce training, and address social inequities that hinder upward social mobility. Policymakers must incentivize firms to expand entry-level positions that hire recent graduates or transitioning workers from declining industries. Funding paid internships, fellowships, and research programs in government roles and critical industries will advance research, innovation, and economic resilience. Especially with the proliferation of AI, soft skills and digital literacy will become desired qualifications in the modern workforce. To improve digital literacy, local and federal agencies must provide educational resources for job seekers to upskill by obtaining certifications and in turn earn higher wages.⁵⁵ Policymakers must expand job workshops and skills training resources to help workers catch up to automation, gain new skills, and position themselves as attractive candidates for in-demand positions.

In addition, policymakers should expand workforce training programs in high-growth sectors such as technology and clean energy to combat unemployment and increase the labor participation rate. Expanding apprenticeship programs produce positive outcomes with 94% of

⁵⁴ Cliburn, “Despite Continued Attacks on DEI, the Business Case Remains,”

⁵⁵ Kendall, Colavito, and Moller, “America’s Digital Skills Divide,”

apprentices able to find employment after program completion with an average salary of \$70,000.⁵⁶ Policymakers must supplant state programs encouraging work-based learning to fill in-demand occupations and expand high-quality certification opportunities for young job seekers. Compared to other advanced nations, the U.S. spends one fifth the amount on labor market programs.⁵⁷ Policymakers should invest in career readiness programs for students from as early as middle school to narrow the skills divide and help companies meet their growing demand for skilled workers. For example, a JPMorgan report recommended subsidizing dual enrollment programs to help students gain college credit and increasing access to work-based learning experiences to allow students to learn from industry experts in professional working environments.⁵⁸ Investing in job creation programs breaks cycles of generational poverty and helps firms attract top talent. Policymakers must reform the job market to address socioeconomic inequality, expand workforce development programs, and promote growth in critical industries.

Conclusion

In the end, long standing issues such as inflation, housing unaffordability, and job market instability compound the cost of living crisis and threaten the long-term growth of the domestic economy. As a result, policymakers must avoid falling into the trap of pursuing short-term policies such as tariffs and underinvestment in social services that widens the gap between the rich and the poor. Instead, the government must rethink what kind of economy should serve the American people, and how to best distribute commodities, housing, and job opportunities in an affordable, efficient, future-forward strategy. Employing long-term strategies such as relinking

⁵⁶ “Expanding Economic Opportunity through High-Quality Career Readiness”

⁵⁷ Goodman, “Workforce Development: Reimagining and Modernizing How To Connect Workers With Good Jobs,”

⁵⁸ “Expanding Economic Opportunity through High-Quality Career Readiness”

transnational trade routes, reinvesting in public housing programs, and updating job market practices to accommodate automation will extend broader opportunities to individuals from all income levels. Instilling economic programs premised on accessibility, affordability, and opportunity not only uplifts individuals, but creates an unshakable foundation for the growth of the national and global economy in the 21st century.

Domestic Economy Policy Options

- I. Invest in technological and physical infrastructure to reduce inflation, create new jobs, and expand self-sufficiency in key technologies**
 - a. Couple infrastructure investments with federal funds to expand healthcare services, housing credits, and unemployment benefits to restore purchasing power for low-income individuals**
- II. Subsidize public housing programs for low income communities through public-private partnerships to incentivize developers to build multi-use developments in densely populated, expensive cities**
 - a. Complement housing projects in tandem with investments in education, healthcare, and food security in the respective communities**
- III. Modernize the job market by strengthening workforce training, expanding apprenticeship programs, and institutionalizing career readiness in public education to promote upward social mobility**

The Dual Imperative of U.S. Trade

Trade is an essential apparatus for countries' national economies as it allows them to specialize in industries where they hold a comparative advantage over others. Comparative advantage is the ability to produce a good or service at a lower opportunity cost than other contenders in the field. By investing resources in these industries with a comparative advantage and exporting the produced goods and services, countries can drive generative economic growth. Meanwhile, the goods and services which are not manufactured domestically in the specialized field(s) are imported. In select instances, countries still develop non-comparative advantageous goods and services, but on a lesser scale. Oftentimes, the supply is insufficient to meet the demand, and the difference needs to be imported. This creates economic dependencies between trading partners. These same themes will be investigated through U.S. trade dependency, trade alliances, natural resources, the U.S.-China trade war, exporter trust and cybersecurity, global supply chains, and with a focus on material goods to identify strategies for enhancing national security and economic resilience.

Trade Alliances

Trade alliances enable enhanced country specialization by reducing potential obstacles such as trade barriers and increasing access to a wider market. Eliminating trade restrictions (e.g. tariffs and quotas) and the ability to access larger markets, such as the European Union, ensures a stable supply of essential goods, allowing countries to invest resources in specialized industries. According to the Office of the United States Trade Representative, the U.S. is the world's second-largest exporter of goods, with China being the first and the world's largest importer of goods. The top three destinations for U.S. exports are Canada (\$356B), Mexico (\$324B), and

China (\$150B). Conversely, the leading sources of U.S. imports are, once more, China (\$536B), Mexico (\$454B), and Canada (\$436B). The data highlights that Canada, Mexico, and China are the U.S.'s most significant trade partners.

I. NAFTA/ USMCA

Trade between the United States, Mexico, and Canada was strengthened by the North American Free Trade Treaty (NAFTA), established in the 1990s, through means such as reducing transportation costs and tariffs between the countries. As of 2019-2020, the major commodities imported by the U.S. from Mexico consisted of automobiles, electronics, oil, and nuclear reactors. Additionally, there are overlaps when it comes to imports and exports between the U.S. and Canadian trade as well; the primary imported commodities from Canada are oil, minerals, lime, and cement. Similar to the trade with Mexico, major U.S. exports to Canada include machinery, mechanical appliances, and transportation equipment. This trade overlap with Mexico is a result of the lower labor costs of Mexican industries, which reduces the overall cost of goods. The United States exported similar goods to what it imported, in addition to exporting plastics and organic chemicals. It is important to note that there are overlaps in some U.S. states where they import the same commodities they export. The replacement of the NAFTA agreement in 2020 with the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) mainly affected United States trade with Mexico. The lower wages in Mexico that derived from this change created an imbalance in the U.S.-Mexico trade. To protect its manufacturing industry, the U.S., through USMCA, created new regulations regarding wage gaps. For trade between the U.S. and Mexico, USMCA largely affected the trade of automotive, oil, and electronics. As a result, Mexican automobile companies were required to reduce their importation of non-USMCA countries and increase the importation of U.S. automobiles. Tariffs for oil were also eliminated under USMCA,

expanding Mexico's natural gas sector and U.S. and Canada's access to it. Additionally, lowered tariffs on electronic goods and geographical proximity have reduced Mexico and Canada's transition from importing China's electronics instead of the U.S.'s. This transition is especially prevalent in Mexico due to manufacturing costs. USMCA has forced Mexican companies to increase labor wages to be similar to the U.S.'s wages if they wished to trade with the U.S. The large difference between the two country's wages lowered trade profitability for Mexico. On the other hand, China has a similar wage to Mexico's, increasing profitability for Mexican companies, even with the larger transportation costs. While the implementations of USMCA increased the economy of the United States, they also contributed to the trade war with China.

II. Natural Resources

Natural Resources are a major component of trade between the three countries – U.S., Canada, and Mexico—especially with the United States relying on many such as oil and rare earth minerals. Since the 1990s, the U.S. has decreased its importation of petroleum from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and increased importation from Canada instead. As of 2022, imports from Canada comprised a total of 52% of the U.S. gross petroleum imports and 60% of gross crude oil imports. This makes Canada the largest exporter of petroleum and crude oil to the U.S., with Mexico being the second largest, with a 10% gross import of both types of oils. The transition of importing petroleum and crude oil from Canada and Mexico instead of OPEC can be attributed to national security. Rising tensions in the Middle East, especially with Iran and Iraq, created a national security concern regarding the dependency on U.S. oil trade with these countries. USMCA has made it safer, more efficient, and cheaper for the U.S. to import oil from its neighbors instead.

U.S. crude oil exports have drastically increased since the government-imposed ban on crude oil exports was lifted. Ever since 2018, Europe, Asia, and Oceania have been the top importers of U.S. crude oil. In 2022, Mexico, Canada, and China were the top importers of U.S. petroleum, with South Korea, The Netherlands, and Canada being the top importers of crude oil. The sanctions imposed on Russia due to its invasion of Ukraine have additionally increased the demand for U.S. crude oil in both Europe and China. To meet demands to increase exports to the Netherlands and China, the U.S. has had to reduce its exports to India. Consequently, India turned to Russia for crude oil imports and received lower prices. The EIA reports that U.S. crude oil exports to India fell 47%, and India's importation of Russian crude oil more than doubled from 2022 to 2023. India is an important international actor whose nuclear weapons give it and its allies a leveraging edge in negotiations. Because of this, the U.S. must maintain a partnership with India rather than a country that holds animosity towards the U.S., like Russia.

III. Future Trade Alliances

As of now, the most important trade alliances the United States holds are with Mexico and Canada. The current administration's tariffs threaten to jeopardize these highly valuable and forged alliances and ultimately eliminate USMCA. Political concerns regarding illegal immigration and the trafficking of drugs, like fentanyl, are the driving matters in these new policies. The Trump Administration is leveraging the economic power of the U.S. in an attempt to achieve its desired political policies and promises. The U.S. indeed does have a strong economy, but as a trading partner, the U.S. can be replaced as seen with India for the crude oil, exemplifying why it is important to take more strategic approaches to correlated policies moving forward. If Mexico or Canada were to break USMCA and find a new trading partner, it could have detrimental effects on the U.S.

Fundamentally, consumers will be those affected by higher commodity prices from tariffs and new trading alliances. The U.S. is geographically distant from most regions of the world, sharing borders with only Mexico and Canada. This acts not only as a defense against attacks on its home territory but also a large economic pressure of cost and transportation of trade materials. Whichever state(s) the U.S. will replace Mexico or Canada with will greatly increase transportation costs and carbon emissions because of further distances. The new trade partner(s) can utilize the U.S. need for a new alliance to create unequal trade policies. For instance, if the country were to have a lower minimum wage policy than the U.S., it could use its leverage to not establish an equal wage policy (like the U.S. did with Mexico), creating an advantage for its goods over the ones nationally produced in the U.S., ultimately serving as a travesty to the economy.

A second effect would be the loss of allies outside of the trading realm. When India replaced the U.S. with Russia for its crude oil exports, it implied that it might be willing to ally with Russia on the international political stage. Trade builds a dependence between two countries, and according to the liberal political view, this interdependence consequently creates alliances. If Canada and Mexico were to ally with a country which the U.S. is in either direct or indirect conflict with, such as Russia, it would alternately grant that said country access to land bordering U.S. territory. This would, therefore, increase the national security threat posed by that country against the United States.

The two previously mentioned effects are the primary reasons why the U.S. must eliminate its current tariffs and turn its attention to strengthening its alliance with Mexico and Canada. The geographical proximity between these countries and the U.S. reduces transportation costs, allowing for cheaper trade, which later reflects on the state of the U.S., its policies,

economy, security, and other means. Additionally, it also ensures the country's longevity due to the reduction of carbon emissions that derive from a lesser need for transportation of goods. The European Union is equally as important as the alliance with Mexico and Canada, and the U.S. must focus on strengthening its trade alliance with the Union as well. While the EU is an important ally, both regarding trade and other affairs of equal importance, the cost of the transportation of goods and production once more plays an eminent role in determining the necessary amount of reliance the U.S. should have and whether it proves beneficial. There are increased policies that EU countries hold for imported and exported goods that contradict those of the U.S., especially when it comes to the agricultural sector. The agriculture section of the Economy part of this report further expands on specific trading policies regarding agricultural goods. Having a high reliance on these countries is not beneficial due to the larger risks of supply chain disruptions and increased costs to abide by the given trading policies. Trade with Mexico and Canada holds less risk and is more cost-efficient.

Overall, the countries whose trade alliance goals best align with those of the U.S.'s well-being are Mexico and Canada. Acknowledging this, it is crucial that moving forward, the U.S. strengthens its alliance with its neighbors instead of threatening relations by imposing tariffs, such as the ones imposed by the Trump Administration in January of 2024. Tariffs increase the cost of imported goods and the price of goods for consumers.

U.S.-China Trade War

The US-China trade war began in January 2018, when the United States sought to address its large trade deficit with China. Combined, the dependence on Chinese goods and the trade deficit contribute to the heap of accumulated and growing U.S. debt. The higher the debt ceiling, the more the U.S. dollar loses its global value, which ultimately ends up benefiting U.S.

competitors such as China. In an attempt to mitigate this issue, the U.S. imposed tariffs on China's key industries, and China countered by imposing its own tariffs in response, creating a cycle of continuous tariffs. Efforts to alleviate the trade war include the 2020 'Phase One' pact. This pact has helped stabilize trade tensions but did not manage to resolve underlying political strains, such as espionage, competing military capabilities, and different political systems. Ongoing political differences between the two nations have further escalated the trade war, this being particularly concerning for the United States as Chinese goods account for 20% of global trade and 16.5% of total imported goods.

I. Global Consequences of the Trade War

The US-China trade war has increased U.S. import of commodities from Mexico, Canada, and the EU. While overall U.S. imports from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries have increased, several categories of imported goods, such as information and communications technology (ICT) products, have decreased due to trade war tariffs, largely impacting the U.S. consumer by high product prices. The trade commodities that have decreased between ASEAN and the U.S. are in the same categories in which the U.S. imposed tariffs on China. This is one example of how the trade war with China has impacted other trade alliances that the U.S. holds.

U.S. tariffs on Chinese commodities redirected commerce routes to benefit Mexico, Canada, and EU exporters, and tariffs allowed new global players, such as Vietnam, to enter the major trade supply chain. Due to the trade war, China was able to expand its supply routes throughout Asia, Africa, Oceania, and Latin America using the Belt Road Initiative. The initiative has created an infrastructure that allows for reduced transportation costs while additionally helping member countries build their economies while increasing China's trade allies' economic power

and Chinese political alliances. As of 2023, a total of 147 countries have aligned with the Belt and Road Initiative, comprising 40% of the world's GDP. While the initiative is beneficial to China for building new alliances, drawbacks include debt default. Several third-world countries are unable to pay back their debt to China in monetary means or other terms set in place, such as lending a major port for 99 years, in the case of Sri Lanka and their Hambantota Port, leading to a halt in their development abilities. The inability of countries to pay back their loans threatens the ability of China to continue to expand its investment and its overall financial health. China's willingness to take risky investment paths, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, to gain an upper hand in its competition with the U.S. by weakening potential U.S. alliances highlights the importance of resolving the trade war to secure future benefits for the U.S.

Another consequence of the trade war is the division between countries and politics based on their support for either China or the U.S. The competition in play between the two countries increases the contest for trade alliances regarding natural resources and highly advanced technology, such as semiconductors. For instance, both countries are competing to gain stable access to Taiwan's semiconductors, which would provide advantageous results for either state. China is approaching this by attempting to regain sovereignty over Taiwan through means of cyberattacks and other political threats, and the U.S. through building political alliances with Taiwan and reinstating support and protection regarding China. Other such countries are almost forced to ally with either one of the competitors to remain under their economic umbrella and have access to certain benefits. An instance exemplifying this was that to sign onto the Belt and Road Initiative, Nicaragua had to sever its diplomatic ties with Taiwan to be able to access benefits. This ultimately demonstrates the ways the competition between China and the U.S. is

not only affecting those two states but also the relations between other countries, creating an ultimately divided international arena.

II. COVID-19 Impact

One of the most significant impacts of the pandemic was the realization that the U.S. was highly dependent on Chinese supply chains, a vulnerability that had not been fully evident before. The outbreak of COVID-19 led to widespread disruptions in production across various regions of China, resulting in severe shortages of critical equipment needed to combat the pandemic, such as personal protective equipment (PPE), ventilators, and other medical supplies. These shortages emphasized the susceptibility of global supply chains and raised concerns about over-reliance on one single country for the majority of essential goods. In response, many countries, including the U.S., increased domestic production in industries critical to national security and public health. Governments implemented policies to incentivize local production and diversify international suppliers to mitigate the global supply chain risks. This shift transformed global supply chains, leading countries to favor regional supply networks that are thought to be more resilient to future disruptions.

In addition to reshaping global supply dynamics, the pandemic also increased China's role in the global vaccine supply chain. At the beginning of the pandemic, Western countries struggled with vaccine distribution and production constraints. China, on the other hand, rapidly expanded its vaccine manufacturing and exportation capabilities to developing countries. By offering vaccines at a critical moment when Western (U.S.) alternatives were scarce, China increased its economic and political relationship with countries in South America and Asia. The expansion of Chinese influence, especially among traditional U.S. allies, has escalated the

competition between China and the U.S. for economic and political dominance in the Indo-Pacific region.

The increased tensions due to the realization of dependency on Chinese trade and the growing Chinese influence have significantly diminished the effectiveness of the Phase One pact. The long-term implications of the COVID-19 pandemic are still uncertain. However, what is clear is that the global supply chain landscape has been fundamentally altered to have a greater focus on regional partnerships.

III. Future U.S. Relations with China

The impact on trade flows due to the trade war has proven the strength of the U.S. and China in the global economy. If the United States wants to continue holding a large influence in the international economy once it is no longer the dominant power, it is imperative that it sets aside its political differences with China and creates a cooperative trade policy. As seen during and in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, dependency on Chinese trade creates a national security problem for the U.S. To increase supply chain security, the U.S. must strengthen its trade alliances within its region, with a large focus on Mexico and Canada. This can be achieved by increasing the strength of USMCA through lowering tariffs and the necessity for Mexico to match the U.S. wages in all commodity manufacturing. Additionally, the U.S. needs to increase domestic production in public health and other critical industries, such as semiconductors. However, because China is a major producer of several rare earth metals, the U.S. cannot fully replace China as a trading partner. Expanding agreements like the Phase One pact is the first step to lessen the competition between these two countries, and during the negotiations of the agreement, the U.S. must concede. Even so, the U.S. must keep an import quota on specific industries like the mechanical and automotive sectors to reduce its debt crisis

and maintain the global value of the U.S. dollar. By focusing on strategic cooperation with China and strengthening regional trade alliances with Mexico and Canada, the U.S. can protect its economic stability and enhance supply chain resilience.

Exporter Trust and Cybersecurity

The Internet of Things (IoT), a network of devices connected to the Internet, is rapidly expanding, making cybersecurity crucial to ensure national security. As more industries and individuals rely on interconnected smart devices, the potential vulnerabilities in supply chains have significantly increased. The importance of exporter integrity was brought to attention in 2024 with the exploding pagers and walkie-talkies in Lebanon. These devices were purposely manufactured to explode by B.A.C. Consulting, a Hungarian-based company that was controlled by Israeli intelligence. While the intention was to target Hezbollah members, regular civilians, including children, were killed. This occurrence exemplifies how countries and other entities can target the U.S. and its allies by posing as secure companies and selling compromised goods, leading to serious humanitarian and national security risks through the system of trade.

Compromised goods are not limited to causing physical damage, such as the pagers and walkie-talkies in the above example, but can also include malware for spying, gaining access to users' personal information, and manipulating data. Hackers and other parties can exploit software vulnerabilities to infiltrate government, corporate systems, and critical infrastructure, potentially causing large-scale economic and security disruptions. Current major concerns regarding this issue are not only physical goods but also digital services such as app-based platforms (i.e. social media) and cloud storage. Concerns have arisen over data privacy due to cyber-espionage on everyday applications, which the U.S. has already taken steps to mitigate by banning certain companies that are a potential threat to national security, such as Huawei, and

increasing investigation over foreign-developed apps like TikTok. As seen in the previous example, these cybersecurity concerns have influenced U.S. trade policies to restrict certain foreign technology companies, changing global trade dynamics to enforce the connection between national security and economic strategy.

With the rapid expansion of technology, the U.S. must be prepared for a future where both physical and digital goods can pose a security threat through their potential to cause kinetic damage. The U.S. must be prepared to address new emerging threats, such as cyber-attacks created by artificial intelligence and the weaponization of Internet-connected devices. As financial institutions become more reliant on the IoT and digital platforms, the development of robust security protocols becomes essential.

There are five major solutions the U.S. can implement. (1) First, policymakers should create clearly defined policies for the importation of goods. This includes stricter evaluating procedures for the legitimacy of foreign companies before establishing trade and increased transparency requirements for companies operating in the U.S. (2) Second, there should be reduced reliance on potentially compromised foreign suppliers, which can be done by increasing the domestic production of both physical and digital goods. The U.S. government has more control over the regulations of companies under its jurisdiction and can ensure the safety of the goods better than if the company were under the jurisdiction of another entity. (3) Third, the U.S. should invest in domestic software development, semiconductor manufacturing, and cybersecurity research will help lessen security risks while increasing economic growth. (4) Fourth, it is necessary to educate the public about cybersecurity risks, starting with middle and high schools. This is a time when most young Americans are first introduced to the cyber realm via their friends and the implementation of internet devices for classes. Changing curricula to

include what potential cybersecurity risks may be and how to address them can create generations of people who are more secure from cyber threats. In turn, the students can educate their guardians and other older members of society. Another education program includes workforce-mandated training. (5) The fifth major solution is to strengthen alliances in sharing information. Intelligence-sharing networks can increase the identification and counter for cyber threats before they fully materialize. Currently, the U.S. is part of the Five Eye agreement, which ensures information sharing between the U.S., U.K., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The solidity of this alliance was lessened in 2013 when Edward Snowden, a U.S., CIA and NSA employee, released classified U.S. documents about its intelligence programs. The U.S.'s next steps should include improving its connection to the other Five Eye countries.

This goes to reinstate the notion that the U.S. can better safeguard its national security while conducting trade in an increasingly interconnected world by proactively expanding its policies, domestic industries, education, and intelligence-sharing alliances.

Conclusion

Trade is fundamental for economic growth because it allows for specialization in industries with a comparative advantage. However, this creates a dependency that can be a national security risk due to disruptions in global supply chains due to occurrences such as pandemics, wars, cybersecurity threats, and other impactful events. This section provided insight into alliances, the U.S.-China Trade War, and exporter trust and cybersecurity as important factors tied to U.S. functionality within the world.

The U.S. is dependent on trade alliances to maintain economic stability and security. The most important U.S. trade alliances are with Canada, Mexico, and China. Because of increased security and reduced transportation costs and carbon emissions, future trade policies should

prioritize strengthening USMCA. Lessened tariffs between the three countries should be enforced. To prevent Mexico from further turning to China as a preferred trading partner, the U.S. needs to allow Mexico one important industry where it is not forced to match wages with those of the U.S. If all Mexican manufacturers did not have to match wages, then the majority U.S. industries will suffer from reduced clientele. However, the same would occur if all Mexican manufacturers had to match wages. The balance therefore is to allow one or two Mexican industries to not match wages.

The trade war between the U.S. and China has reshaped global supply routes and increased economic and political tensions between the two countries. The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the trade war by highlighting vulnerabilities in U.S. dependence on Chinese supply chains. This indicates that moving forward, the U.S. must create a balance in its trade relationship with China while strengthening regional trade alliances. Additionally, the U.S. must increase domestic production in critical industries.

Global trade security encompasses both physical and digital goods. Malware inside IoT devices and software programs can compromise the security of U.S. citizens and supply chains. The U.S. should implement policies focusing on stricter import regulations, increasing domestic production, and enhancing public awareness of cybersecurity threats.

In conclusion, to ensure long-term economic resilience and national security, the U.S. must prioritize strengthening its regional trade alliances, reducing reliance on foreign suppliers in critical sectors, increasing domestic production, and implementing stronger cybersecurity measures and education programs.

U.S. Trade Policy Options

- I. Enhance USMCA by eliminating trade barriers (primarily tariffs)**
 - a. Strengthen the U.S.-Mexico alliance through wage policy adjustments: modify the wage-matching requirement under USMCA to allow increased flexibility for Mexican companies, ensuring fair wages and regional economic stability**
- II. Expand domestic production of critical goods: increase investments in manufacturing essential products like semiconductors and medical supplies**
 - a. Additionally, develop and prioritize domestic digital infrastructure: invest in domestic industries to reduce reliance on foreign platforms and digital trade**
- III. Implement comprehensive cybersecurity education initiatives**

Modernizing the U.S. Role in the Global Economy

Globalization has permeated the world and created vast interconnections between nations. Its force has spread cultural practices, but it has also made nations highly reliant on each other. Major global events no longer exist in isolation, they influence nations on the other side of the world. This is felt most deeply in the economy. Nations have their own internal economies that fluctuate and affect their citizens on a private level, but we now face a global economy that influences all nations, and that is due to globalization. What has been called into question in the 21st century is to what extent the United States should engage with globalization, and how much it should prioritize its own domestic interests. The world is now far too globalized for any nation, let alone a powerhouse such as the United States to turn their back on it. The U.S. must work to balance a globalized economy with domestic production, manufacturing, and general economic practices. Globalization has cultivated an environment of economic competition that influences the U.S. economy and other powerful nations alike. China, as its largest and most prominent competitor, will be important to address. The U.S. must continue to engage with globalization, but a completely globalized economy cannot be the leading political agenda. Success in foreign economic endeavors cannot be achieved without a strong domestic economy. Economic hardships are some of the most personal and impactful struggles people can face. When they exist, communities have limited capacity to support other goals outside of improving the economy. In this vein, it will be of the utmost importance to accomplish the policy goals regarding the domestic economy in order to have a successful foreign economic policy. The U.S. must therefore develop strategies to engages with globalization while ensuring domestic

economic strength by integrating critical industries of the economy, funding economic corridors, and revitalizing sanctions so they are successful in the 21st century.

Integrating Domestic and Globalized Industries

I. Supply Chain and COVID

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic showed the world how reliant society is on trade and how disruptions in the supply chain can significantly impact lives. The pandemic was a major indicator to many that a fully globalized economy was not advantageous for domestic economic stability. Demand for medical supplies during that time was one of the first major indicators revealing issues within the global supply chain.⁵⁹ When people needed medical supplies or the COVID-19 vaccine, there were mass delays due to products no longer being produced in the U.S. This has proven itself to be a major security threat to the U.S. because of the reliance on the supply chain to deliver lifesaving medications. During the pandemic, there was a transition in the “points of consumption.”⁶⁰ People began to demand goods for at-home life like flour, webcams, dumbbells, and cleaning supplies. This created a shock in an already strained global supply chain. Instead of being able to go out into society to accomplish tasks or something as simple as exercise, people had to figure out at-home alternatives, and so they began to demand goods at a quantity never seen before.⁶¹ Simultaneously, people had to quarantine and go into lock-down, causing mass disruptions within the global supply chain, resulting in shortages of goods that Americans had not experienced in many years. During this panic, people began to question how much we should truly rely on the global supply chain. COVID-19 was the catalyst for such

59 Richard Baldwin and Rebecca Freeman, "Risks and Global Supply Chains: What We Know and What We Need to Know"

60 Rajat Panwar, Jonatan Pinkse, and Valentina De Marchi, "The Future of Global Supply Chains in a Post-COVID-19 World"

61 B. M. Boylan, J. McBeath, and B. Wang, "US-China Relations: Nationalism, the Trade War, and COVID-19"

significant disruptions that impacted everyone but, the supply chain has already been victim to disruptions from environmental sources. Major environmental disasters significantly disrupt the global supply chain, and models show that an unprepared company will suffer a 35% decline in production while a prepared company will only have a 5% decline.⁶²

Moving forward, plans need to be implemented to mitigate the effects of a disrupted supply chain. One of the loudest responses is to bring all industry back to the U.S. and virtually pull out of the supply chain. These protectionist ideas will be further discussed in the next section. But other methods include better management of trade transportation by using digital tracking methods. This will allow boats to see where traffic jams are and avoid them to be more efficient. Dual sourcing will be critical to ensure near constant access to goods, services, and materials needed. Dual sourcing means importing goods from other countries which means the U.S. will not be fully reliant on one nation for important goods. The supply chain is integral in the global economy, much of the domestic industries cannot function without it, so it is integral to innovate it rather than turn away from it.

II. Globalized Economy vs. Protectionism

Since the 1970s, globalization has experienced an arch of effectiveness. In the late 1970s, there was a shift to “hyperglobalization” which led to “peak globalization” around 2011, and since then there has been a downward trend known as “de-globalization.”⁶³ This trend of de-globalization has led to a push for protectionism within the U.S. government. Much of this started under President Trump’s first administration but had continued under the Biden Administration as well. Former President Biden expressed his intent in “bringing supply chains

62 Rajat Panwar, Jonatan Pinkse, and Valentina De Marchi

63 William Milberg, Thomas Liess, and Michael Tedesco, “Globalization after De-Globalization”

back to the United States.”⁶⁴ COVID-19 was a major factor in encouraging protectionism within the U.S. Prior to this, although it was the era of de-globalization, there was not much momentum to turn to protectionism. This has led the U.S. to reflect on globalization and determine what its benefits are and how to bring industry back.

A complete abandonment of globalization would be detrimental to the U.S. economy. For utmost benefit, the U.S. must meld both urges to remain a major player in the world economy, while having a strong domestic economy that ensures the security of Americans. Beginning with protectionism, it is important to have a complete understanding of how it will affect the U.S. Tariffs in 2018 did not go unopposed in the global economy, nations retaliated with their own tariffs targeting U.S. goods. The tariffs rose from “7.3% to 20.4% on 8,073 export products covering \$128 billion” U.S. exports.⁶⁵ These resulted in the decline of imports on average of 31.7% with exports having fallen an average 9.9%.⁶⁶ These percentages are felt within the U.S. economy, and the expansion of protectionist policies will exacerbate the negative effects. Protectionism could help slow China’s rise but, their economy has become so expansive that it is unlikely it will inflict significant change, as these policies are not effective for long-term growth or change. If China is able to recover from the initial shock of losing U.S. capital, they will most likely be able to maintain their economic power.⁶⁷ Investing completely in protectionism will put USD supremacy further at risk and will create a power vacuum in the international economy. It is important to protect the U.S. dollar’s role as the global reserve currency because it puts the

64 Ethan B. Kapstein. “Exporting Capitalism: Private Enterprise and US Foreign Policy”

65 Fajgelbaum, Pablo D, Pinelopi K Goldberg, Patrick J Kennedy, and Amit K Khandelwal. “The Return to Protectionism”

66 Fajgelbaum, Pablo D, Pinelopi K Goldberg, Patrick J Kennedy, and Amit K Khandelwal

67 Chivvis, Christopher S., and Ethan B. Kapstein. “U.S. Strategy and Economic Statecraft: Understanding the Tradeoffs”

U.S. at the center of global trade. It gives the U.S. more power on the global stage and makes it easier to accomplish policy goals.⁶⁸ If the yuan were to take over the role as reserve currency, there would be a financial crisis in the U.S. and the rest of the world. It would expose the U.S. to currency shocks and high interest rates.⁶⁹ This role will most likely be filled by the next most powerful economy, China.⁷⁰ Protectionism is not a long-term solution to bolstering production within the U.S., it is a model that will only create a stage for China to further expand its economic influence and diminish U.S. dominance in innovation and authority.

On the other hand, complete globalization also poses risks to the U.S. economy. It is a security risk for the U.S. to have complete reliance on factories located in China for the production of so many goods. It is especially a risk in critical goods like lithium-ion batteries and semiconductors. Globalization, however, is a major driver of innovation and economic growth within nations.⁷¹ Therefore, globalization offers the U.S. the greatest access to markets, not simply for imports but for exports as well. Losing the capital from U.S. exports would be detrimental to the economy. Incorporating economic allyships with nations of similar socioeconomic standing can alternatively provide strength to the U.S. global economy, making it an advantageous alternative approach.⁷² Whereas, protectionism can put relationships at risk and cause economic downturn, making it a less-than-ideal direction to take. For successful foreign and domestic economies, the U.S. must continue to be a robust trade entity in the world, but they also must bring critical industries home like batteries and semiconductors.

68 Thomas Costigan, Drew Cottle, and Angela Keys. "The US Dollar as the Global Reserve Currency: Implications for US Hegemony"

69 Thomas Costigan, Drew Cottle, and Angela Keys

70 Chivvis, Christopher S., and Ethan B. Kapstein

71 Chivvis, Christopher S., and Ethan B. Kapstein

72 Chivvis, Christopher S., and Ethan B. Kapstein

Lithium-ion Batteries and Semiconductors

Critical industries are integral to maintaining the functions of life and security within a nation. Two industries that are most critical to the U.S. are lithium-ion batteries and semiconductors. These are massively produced in Taiwan and China, and if there are future disruptions in the global supply chain it will be detrimental to the U.S. These industries are ones that the U.S. needs to diversify in regard to its imports or begin domestic production. Production at home will be advantageous because it will provide jobs for millions of Americans and make the U.S. tech industry less dependent on foreign imports for such vital goods. The price of goods produced in the U.S. will be much higher due to regulatory laws concerning wages and working conditions, but this could be mitigated through government subsidies. The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 provided tax credits and investments to the clean energy sector, specifically \$70 billion for the battery industry.⁷³ The provided tax credits will discount more than 30% of the total production cost and make the U.S. more cost-competitive on the global stage.⁷⁴ An expanded U.S. battery industry will diversify the global market and force other companies to change to stay competitive in the industry. It may also influence other companies to provide better labor conditions to retain employees and a strong customer base.

The battery race is a sector of production in which the U.S. has the ability to advance beyond the quality and quantity of current Chinese production. China is the world's biggest producer of lithium ion batteries, manufacturing a total of 76% of the world's batteries.⁷⁵ This is extremely significant because they are used in everything from computers and phones to military

73 Ahmed Mehdi and Tom Moerenhout, "The IRA and the U.S. Battery Supply Chain: One Year On"

74 Ahmed Mehdi and Tom Moerenhout

75 Melissa Lott, "The Great Battery Manufacturing Race,"

technology and even power grid storage installations.⁷⁶ The average American is highly dependent on batteries in their daily lives so, if something were to happen to the supply, there would be pandemonium. As it stands today, the U.S. is unable to compete with the current production of batteries, but if funds were directed toward battery innovation for the future, they could become major competitors. When creating their battery industry, China invested in it early, before there was such a high demand. This was due to the fact that they were unable to compete with the combustion engine production in the U.S.⁷⁷ The investment clearly paid off and now, the U.S. should take a similar approach for the development of their battery sector. Investing in new batteries that have greater longevity and are manufactured so they do not damage the environment could pivot global trade and make the U.S. the primary global producer of batteries.

Semiconductors are in similar high demand as batteries are in the world. A semiconductor is very important in technology because its function is to control the flow of energy, by turning certain avenues on or off when needed. Semiconductors are found in all forms of technology, from, phones, computers, led lights, and anything that uses electricity.⁷⁸ Taiwan is the world's largest producer of semiconductors, and the U.S. is dependent on imports for their technology to work.⁷⁹ There have been shortages in the past which had severe negative impacts on economies. COVID-19 caused shortages because people were unable to go to the factory and assemble them. Additionally, climate change is also a big threat to production. A drought in Taiwan caused a shortage in production as there was no pure water available to make the

76 Varun Sivaram, Noah Gordon, and Daniel Helmecci, "Winning the Battery Race: How the United States Can Leapfrog China to Dominate Next-Generation Battery Technologies,"

77 Varun Sivaram, Noah Gordon, and Daniel Helmecci

78 Srabanti Chowdhury, "Stanford Explainer: Semiconductors"

79 Srabanti Chowdhury,

conductors.⁸⁰ Once again, the U.S. will not be able to outproduce Taiwan if it invests in the technology of today. But, investing in innovation in the industry can make the U.S. a central player in the future. That is not to say that domestic production should eliminate the trade relationship the U.S. has with Taiwan. The U.S. will need to source materials and will not be able to be the main producer for the whole world. So, using Taiwan as a partner for semiconductor production will increase U.S. influence in Asia and ensure, maintain a strong relationship with Taiwan, and ensure they are a major contributor to the industry. The U.S. should not eliminate all imports from other nations because trade can curate strong beneficial relationships. But innovation will help diversify the industry and prevent industries from fully relying on Taiwanese companies. One of the major sectors that should therefore be invested in is sustainability. Climate change has the ability to vastly alter this industry, so finding other renewable sources could revolutionize it. Also, further innovation like making semiconductors able to withstand higher temperatures could increase the market. The conductor will last longer and can be implemented in power grids and major technology in regions with extreme heat.

Economic Corridors

I. What are Economic Corridors?

Economic corridors are investments into infrastructure to enhance economic capabilities by lowering transportation costs and raising the cost of real estate.⁸¹ Economic corridors are much more than a simple infrastructure plan; they are strategically designed routes to increase economic endeavors and diversify markets.⁸² They are a critical component in integrating

⁸⁰ Srabanti Chowdhury

⁸¹ Brookings Institution, "Economic Corridors."

⁸² PwC India, Transnational Economic Corridors: Strengthening Trade Flows and Development

developing nations into the global economy. Although nations are interconnected in the modern world, some still remain on the outskirts and are not included as active members of international commerce. It is in the best interest of the United States to invest in economic corridors and bring more nations into the international conversation, as this will help grow and protect the U.S. economy and their foreign interests.

As previously mentioned in the *Trade* subsection, the United States' main competitor, China, has developed a multibillion-dollar plan called 'One Belt, One Road' or Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This plan includes the construction of infrastructure like highways and railroads, but also energy pipelines and tech infrastructure such as 5G networks.⁸³ This initiative gives China the ability to influence the development of many countries and create a stronger base for power in the globalized world. China's investments in global infrastructure are not donations, the money has stipulations and demands attached to it. To continue to receive the investments the nations must fulfill the stipulations or implement practices that are often curated to bolster China. This billion-dollar plan has no real match or solid competition from the United States. It is expanding the sphere of globalization through infrastructure but is also increasing the dominance of Chinese currency and could endanger the power of the U.S. dollar in the world.⁸⁴ A weaker U.S. currency will give the U.S. less bargaining power on the global stage. The threat of withdrawing U.S. currency will not be as influential and it will inhibit the ability for the U.S. to achieve its agenda and enforce foreign economic policy.⁸⁵ Globally, "147 nations – accounting for...40 percent of global GDP" have expressed interests in the plan or have already begun

83 James McBride, Noah Berman, and Andrew Chatzy, "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative."

84 James McBride, Noah Berman, and Andrew Chatzy

85 Thomas Costigan, Drew Cottle, and Angela Keys

construction.⁸⁶ Nations are embracing the BRI and the stipulations attached to the funds they receive because it is one of the fastest ways to facilitate advancement and be incorporated more fully into the globalized economy. The BRI has many security concerns for the United States that must be addressed, but this section will focus on the economic concerns the U.S. must address in the wake of this plan.

The U.S. passed a bipartisan bill in 2018 called the BUILD Act that established the International Development Finance Cooperation to combat the BRI.⁸⁷ BUILD was designed to “mobilize private capital in support of broad-based economic growth.”⁸⁸ Funding for economic corridors will be managed by this newly established department. To foster economic growth, economic corridors will be one of the most direct ways to do it. Infrastructure is the key to connecting the world and creating a more diverse global economy. Additionally, it will give the U.S. a new avenue to foster strong relations with foreign nations and bolster the USD in the global economy.

II. Lobito Economic Corridor and Luzon Economic Corridor

The U.S. is engaged in the current development of two economic corridors, those being the Lobito Economic Corridor in Africa and the Luzon Economic Corridor in the Philippines. The Lobito Corridor is located in Central Africa and plans to connect the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, and Zambia. This is a joint effort between the U.S. and the European Union (E.U.), and the plan itself is good-faith and non-binding with the U.S. and E.U. acting in advisory and financial roles. The main concept of the corridor is to expand railroads to further

⁸⁶ James McBride, Noah Berman, and Andrew Chatzy

⁸⁷ Ethan B. Kapstein

⁸⁸ U.S. Congress, Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development (BUILD) Act of 2018

connect inland communities with the coast.⁸⁹ Goals for this to be built environmentally conscious have been set and it is focused on being the catalyst for increased trade and revenue in the region.⁹⁰ This corridor will be of great importance to the host countries, but it will also offer many economic opportunities for the U.S. and the EU. As the advising nations, they have the power to generate revenue from the corridor by using corporations from within their nations to do the contracting of the railway and aid in the construction of it. To prioritize U.S. economic growth and security, this will give the U.S. access to more minerals and natural resources needed for production. This will be key in building relationships with foreign nations and spreading and maintaining the value of the U.S. dollar. Integrating nations with the U.S. dollar will make it harder for China to surpass U.S. influence and bargaining power globally. China is spreading their currency through the BRI so, to combat that the U.S. needs to reinforce the dollar through economic corridors of their own. A critical component of the Lobito Corridor will therefore be the establishment of plans which are more concrete than a good-faith agreement. This will ensure that development plans can continue long term and are not subject to alterations of power in any of the participating nations.

The Luzon Corridor is a joint financial effort between the U.S. and Japan which began planning in April 2023 to advance infrastructure in the Philippines. This is an important corridor to focus on because it places the U.S. at an advantageous and strategic point in Asia where China is the current dominating economic power. This plan focuses on advancements of ports, railroads, and most critically building up the supply chain for semiconductors.⁹¹ One of the main

89 European Commission, Memorandum of Understanding on Working Arrangements Relating to the Development of the Lobito Corridor and the Zambia-Lobito Rail Line

90 U.S. Embassy Zambia. Lobito Corridor Memorandum of Understanding

91 U.S. Department of State, Priority Areas – Office of the U.S. Special Coordinator for the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment

projects of the corridor is the construction of North Luzon Expressway (NLEX) and the South Luzon Expressway (SLEX).⁹² This project will interconnect the nation and allow for faster transfer of goods and make trade more efficient. It is focusing on integrating the agricultural section of the nation with major cities and is centered in Luzon because it is near three major international airports. This will also give the U.S. greater access to minerals and resources needed for battery and semiconductor construction because the Philippines has some of the world's largest reserves.⁹³ The U.S. has planned to invest \$100 billion in the next 10 years and it is of the utmost importance to be successful because it will set the tone for U.S. and Southeast Asian relations.⁹⁴ This plan projects to be so beneficial for Filipino's that it is unlikely any future Filipino administration will oppose U.S. funding for it. Beyond the economic advantages of minerals for the U.S., creating a positive relationship with the Philippines will help establish allies in the region. This is very important for the U.S. because it will combat China's dominance in the region and ensure the U.S. will be able to have economic influence in Asia. The Philippines were the first nation in Southeast Asia to have secure alliances with the U.S. so, many other nations take their cues from them. This means a success in this corridor and a strong relationship could incentivize other nations to engage with the U.S. Ensuring a robust internal domestic economy of the Philippines will make them less likely to rely on Chinese investments and help further diversify the global market.

92 International Trade Administration, "Philippines Luzon Economic Corridor"

93 Pamir Consulting , "US, Japan and the Philippines launch Luzon Economic Corridor to attract G7 countries and expand economic influence in Southeast Asia"

94 Alvin Camba and Ryan Seay, "The Luzon Economic Corridor as the United States' Southeast Asian Litmus Test"

III. Future Developments of Corridors

The United States must develop and expand upon their global corridor plans to compete with China. The U.S. may be experiencing a decline of hegemonic power, but that does not mean they should surrender their powerful role. They must create a balance in order to share the world stage. It is imperative for the U.S. to build development plans with other nations in order to expand the global economy and secure partnerships. Corridors help diversify the economy and provide more competition to industries. They connect historically underdeveloped and disconnected communities to the global economy. This brings in capital that can fund new industries and have more diversity in the global market. It will additionally provide the U.S. economy with more economies to engage with besides China. This will help strengthen national security because in case anything was to happen with Chinese relations, the U.S. will be able to source goods from other nations.

Stipulations with the corridors should include fair wages and working conditions for the people in the country. This may result in an increase in the cost of exported goods, as more expensive goods may mean that consumers will lower their consumption. It, however, will be beneficial to workers because they will have better working conditions. Advancement should include more than an increase in capital, people should be uplifted to a higher quality of life as well. This will make the nation more economically stable and lessen the odds of supply chain disruptions. Equally, the construction of these corridors should prioritize using metals and construction supplies that are made in the U.S. This will help spur industry in the U.S. and broaden the clientele base for U.S. companies. The U.S. should make the Luzon and Lobito Corridors successful and then they can expand their funds into other nations that need infrastructure development. Advancing corridors means that the global supply chains will not be

as exposed to shocks and the U.S. can establish allyships with stronger economies to ensure their financial security.

Sanctions

I. What are Sanctions?

Sanctions have been used for centuries by the U.S. to impose restrictions on the imports of goods from designated countries. They have been imposed to punish foreign adversaries, promote purchasing from American businesses, and in some cases empower citizens to change the socio-political system in their country. As described by Narges Bajoghli, sanctions are designed to work in two ways, to force the government to make the ‘top-down’ change as well encourage citizens of the nation to stand up to the government and demand change.⁹⁵ Sanctions stifle an economy so aggressively, by withdrawing U.S. capital, that nations are forced to change without the use of military violence. Sometimes, as recently seen in Columbia, the mere threat of intense sanctions can force a nation to change. President Trump threatened 25% tariffs on all Columbian goods if Columbia refused to accept the deportation flights.⁹⁶ The next day, the Colombian President released a statement that they would accept the deported immigrants.⁹⁷ Sanctions were used as a political tool to achieve the agenda of the Trump Administration and prevent use of violence to achieve those ends.

Sanctions can range in scope. There can be a sanction on an entire country, like the Embargo on Cuba, or they can be targeted to specific industries like Russian oil. These more

95 Johns Hopkins University, "Do Sanctions Actually Work? Experts Evaluate the Efficacy of This Widely Used Foreign Policy Tool"

96 Phil Stewart and Oliver Griffin, "US, Colombia Reach Deal on Deportations; Tariff, Sanctions Put on Hold"

97 Phil Stewart and Oliver Griffin,

targeted sanctions are called “smart sanctions” and are designed to be more narrowly focused so that civilians are not as affected in the process. The most common triggers are terrorist attacks, military invasions like that of Ukraine, and other behavior that puts a nation at risk. The U.S. leads the world in having the most imposed sanctions against other nations. When a sanction is put into place, it becomes a law, meaning that when a U.S. based corporation violates it, they are subject to penalties. These penalties can range from money owed to time spent in jail.⁹⁸ This is how the government can ensure that the sanction is being followed domestically, and trade is being disrupted globally.

II. Are Sanctions Effective?

Sanctions are one of the most commonly used methods by the U.S. government to impose economic will on another nation. But do sanctions truly achieve their intended goals? In a study done by the U.S. Treasury Department, use of sanctions has gone up 900% from 2000 to 2021.⁹⁹ If sanctions were consistently an effective tool this would not be a problem, but they are not. A study from the University of Utah, shows that sanctions are only effective about 13% of the time.¹⁰⁰ This study was conducted in 2000, which demonstrates that for the past twenty years there has been evidence of the ineffectiveness of sanctions and yet U.S. politicians continue to overuse them. A different study cited by Guar, more generously detailed, found that sanctions only worked about 34% of the time.¹⁰¹ In both of these studies, less than half of implemented sanctions proved to be effective. It is important to note that quantifying the effectiveness of

98 Dow Jones, "Penalties for OFAC Sanctions List Violations"

99 U.S. Department of the Treasury, "2021 Treasury Sanctions Review"

100 Johns Hopkins University

101 Ajai S. Gaur, Alexander Settles, and Juha Väättänen, "Do Economic Sanctions Work? Evidence from the Russia-Ukraine Conflict"

sanctions can be nearly impossible. And, proving that a sanction was the core cause for change in a country is equally improbable. Sanctions have been aids of change, but there have often been dozens of other factors at play that contributed to change in a country.

Concrete evidence has, however, been found to show the ineffectiveness of sanctions. In 2022, Iran became the most sanctioned country in the world.¹⁰² U.S. officials hoped that these sanctions would invigorate the citizens, especially the middle class, to rise up and fight for democratic reform. It had the opposite effect. More people fell into poverty due to this, and 80% of the citizens now rely on government handouts to survive.¹⁰³ Russia has been subject to the most sanctions in history since the invasion of Ukraine. The U.S., European Union, and United Nations hoped that the influx of sanctions would deter Putin from continuing the war. Instead of slowing the invasion, Putin continued his involvement in the war and used sanctions as a tool to gather more support for his cause and condemned the West.¹⁰⁴ Ultimately, the Russian economy saw growth in 2023 even under a sanctioned economy.¹⁰⁵ Russia was able to use their alliances with China to mitigate the negative impact of sanctions placed on them by the U.S. and the E.U.

The U.S. fails to have success with sanctions because they are often used as a symbolic tool to show action in a crisis. This often results in sanctions that are overreaching to the point of ineffectiveness. For a sanction to be truly successful they must be tailored to specific industries or regions where the nation is most vulnerable.¹⁰⁶ Overreaching sanctions strain global alliances and can strain U.S. businesses because it cuts off trade with nations and limits business. It also

102 Johns Hopkins University

103 Johns Hopkins University

104 Daniel W. Drezner, "The United States of Sanctions: The Use and Abuse of Economic Coercion"

105 Daniel W. Drezner

106 Ingram, Harold Lee, "Economic Sanctions: Their Ineffectiveness at Attaining Their Stated Foreign Policy Goals with Specific Reference to the Cuban Case"

hinders business agreements because companies in other nations may fear depending on the U.S. in case they are subject to sanctions in the future.¹⁰⁷ Although the sanction sender does not often feel the pain of the sanction on a national economic level, they can feel the pain extraordinarily during diplomacy.¹⁰⁸ Sanctions should not be used as a political statement, that makes them ineffective and stifles the global economy.

III. Future of Sanctions

As seen above, sanctions most of the time do not achieve their intended goal. They have a very low success rate and are only moderately successful when they are highly specific. That is not to say that sanctions should be eliminated from political use. They must simply be refined and made to work in the 21st century political climate. One of the major issues with sanctions is that they do not often benefit the people in power of another nation. And, if the sanctions are not successful in stifling trade revenue, then there are no incentives for the leaders to facilitate change. Additionally, sanctions were most successful when the U.S. was a full hegemonic power and had little to no economic competition. Now, there are competitors such as China which offer countries a different avenue for economic engagement. Instead of isolating a nation through sanctions, they are brought into Russia's and China's spheres of influence.¹⁰⁹ To replace the influx of U.S. currency, sanctioned nations are turning to China and Russia to continue to expand. In the past when the U.S. was the only major economic powerhouse with little competition, sanctions had more impact but now nations can get trade deals elsewhere. Sanctions must be modernized into bilateral agreements. If sanctions continue at the same rate, the U.S.

¹⁰⁷ Ingram, Harold Lee

¹⁰⁸ Özgür Özdamar and Evgeniia Shahin, "Consequences of Economic Sanctions: The State of the Art and Paths Forward,"

¹⁰⁹ Ajai S. Gaur, Alexander Settles, and Juha Väätänen

will find itself increasing the speed of decline and the U.S. dollar will lose its value and influence in the world. Bilateral agreements will facilitate more positive outcomes and create long lasting relationships that can have a positive impact in the future.

Modernizing sanctions will take time but they should be altered and only used when extremely necessary. Countries are more likely to comply if there is a positive incentive for them. To replace some active sanctions, it would be smart to negotiate treaties or, so change can be implemented quickly, incorporate a positive return for the sanctioned nation. Meaning, the U.S. could offer an incentive for the nation to receive when they have made necessary changes like, a more robust trade deal or increased U.S. aid. Sanctions often fail to empower the people to stand up to their government. So, instead of sanctioning a nation and making the economy less effective, devise aid packages that can benefit the citizens of the nation. This means that instead of forcing those in power to make a change it can help uplift people to a better quality of life, so they have the resources to demand change from their government. The U.S. has historically used trade as their primary tool for foreign diplomacy.¹¹⁰ So, to continue this the U.S. must stay engaged in world commerce. Or they must work to develop other treaties and build relationships with countries that are not built on a foundation of trade benefits.

In order to make sanctions effective, the U.S. needs to ensure that the USD remains a globally strong and eminent currency. As stated above, the power of the dollar makes the threat of its loss a concern for nations. But if the dollar is no longer powerful they will not feel the loss of it as intensely. Pivoting from sanctions to allyships will make the U.S. a stronger and more dependable nation in the long run. Nations may be more open to change if they are able to have a

110 Daniel W. Drezner

voice in the change that is being demanded. It will also create longer lasting change because it is a joint effort and not simply imposed on a nation.

Conclusion

For centuries the U.S. has been the center of the global economy. Since the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a bipartisan push to bring industry back to the U.S. for national security. This push is partially good and partially problematic because the U.S. could overcorrect and harm the global economy. It is important to bring home critical industries like batteries and semiconductors. But reverting to complete protectionism could harm alliances abroad. It is important to balance alliances and national security. The investment in economic corridors is an achievable and strong route to further establish alliances abroad. The U.S. will use investments in economic corridors to diversify the market and foster trust between the U.S. and foreign nations once again. This will provide the U.S. with new markets to source materials from and not have to rely only on China for production. These alliances need to be fostered and should not be endangered by the overuse of sanctions in the global economy. Sanctions need to be refined so they are tailored to work and not used as an overarching political statement. Sanctions could risk the effectiveness of economic corridor alliances. Overall, the U.S. must protect the U.S. dollar supremacy as the world's reserve currency. This is their most important tool to enact successful foreign politics. With this the U.S. will be able to maintain their influence and foster economic growth around the world.

U.S. Role in the Global Economy Policy Options

I. Provide funding to universities designated for battery and semiconductor innovation

- a. Use some of the \$70 billion dollars dedicated for battery innovation to create programs at school that encourage and teach battery innovation. Students are the future of innovation so, investing in them will facilitate change faster**

II. Fund more economic corridors around the world

- a. Fund corridors in nations where the U.S. needs to foster alliances. Also, in regions that have minerals and natural resources, the U.S. needs for production. This will help achieve greater influence and secure the global economy.**

III. Develop strong alliances and partnerships with nations to foster change through mutual benefit instead of relying on sanctions to force the change to occur.

- a. Instead of relying on sanctions to foster change, work with nations to create change that needs to happen. Use the idea of economic prosperity to influence change.**

Conclusion

The economy is the basis for creating change in all aspects of a nation and government. Money drives innovation and change because, without a well-working economy there are no funds to expand other parts of innovation in a nation. Beyond that, the global economy drives alliances, peace talks, and global change. The U.S. is a member of the global economy and must be prepared to be a team player in the future. The global system is changing, and the U.S. is no longer the uncontested hegemonic power, but this does not mean the U.S. must sacrifice its general global standing or power. To be a successful global player, the U.S. must first ensure its domestic prosperity. When people are financially stable, they are able to invest their time and money into different innovative endeavors, but foreign investments can also enhance domestic prosperity. Everything is intertwined. Economic innovation and advancement can leave space to invest in new green technologies and fund programs to mitigate the threat of climate change. Expanded funds mean the U.S. can invest in protecting democratic institutions and working to expand and ensure human rights globally. A secure economy is essential to protecting the American people and ensuring it in the long term.

Concrete and contemplative policy development is required to pave a path to achieving long-term economic goals. A policy that subsidizes housing for low-income families and individuals will be essential to enhance domestic stability. A subsidy like this will provide people with the opportunity to invest in a home and build a life with more stability. A policy that expands the USMCA will be critical to ensuring national safety while furthering strong trade partnerships to maintain a U.S. presence in global trade. Finally, a domestic subsidy on lithium-ion batteries and semiconductors will provide the U.S. with a strong foundation to become a central player in the global supply chain. This policy will be geared towards innovation in the

sector so that the U.S. can be the leader in development instead of trying to compete with today's technology. The policies listed above are all well-rounded and contain components that enhance the domestic economy while laying the foundations for successful foreign engagement. The expansion of these policies will be critical to paving a successful path for the U.S. in the future. The economy is central to this Grand Strategy because it lays the foundation for how to develop the capital to achieve the goals of all subsequent sections in this report. A strong economy will allow for investment in economic expansion but also have resources available to dedicate to environmental, political, and security initiatives.

Environment

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Introduction

The global community is facing an impending climate calamity. In the past decade, the world has experienced record-breaking temperatures, extreme natural disasters, food and water deserts, and rising sea levels.¹¹¹ Research has proven climate change to increasingly become a driver of involuntary displacement and exacerbates border insecurity.¹¹² The science community overwhelmingly agrees that since the 1800s, human activities have significantly contributed to this climate crisis. The exponentially increasing population and overindulging, yet disproportionate, consumption patterns aggravate the predicament by cementing the world's dependence on fossil fuels and rising greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The 2015 Paris Agreement identified climate change as a global emergency. It committed signatory countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and limit rising global temperature to 1.5°C, or well under 2°C, past industrial levels. Additionally, this agreement adopted the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, where all countries are held accountable for climate action based on their different national circumstances.¹¹³

Climate change threatens the survival of the human species, a threat that demands the attention and support of international leaders like the United States. It speaks to the urgency of climate action that the environment has been given an entire section in this grand strategy report. Given the fact that the repercussions of human-induced climate change are felt on a global scale without deference to state borders, it calls upon the entire international community to take action to mitigate these effects. As a top GHG emitter, consumer of fossil fuels, and self-proclaimed

¹¹¹ NOAA, "Climate Change Impacts."

¹¹² Tandon, "In-Depth Q&A: How Does Climate Change Drive Human Migration?"

¹¹³ United Nations, "The Explainer: The Paris Agreement."

leader, the United States has a responsibility to hold itself accountable for meaningful climate action. Maintaining a consistent narrative of the importance of climate change domestically and internationally is a goal the United States must achieve, as it cannot reach any policy or legislative actions without bipartisan support. With all its resources and manpower, the U.S. has the capacity, and responsibility, to support those inadvertently affected by climate change, effects felt more substantially by communities still in developing countries and lacking adequate financial and industrial resources to mitigate them. Further, aiming to sustain itself as a world leader takes an understanding of when to depoliticize an issue for economic progress.

The U.S. struggles with extreme party polarization, which has intensified around climate policy since the late 20th century.¹¹⁴ With the quick turnaround rate of U.S. administrations, parties have been engaged in political gridlock, constantly revoking and reforming their predecessor's policies before their impacts are meaningfully realized. This stalemate stems from the inability to foster bipartisan support for durable climate legislation. From President Clinton to President Biden, administrations have weaponized executive orders to bypass Congress and push their party's priorities.¹¹⁵ However, this strategy delegitimizes efforts to reconcile opposing parties and discredits climate change as a legitimate, and urgent, crisis rather than a liberal ploy for power. To effectively tackle the climate crisis and retain its status as a great power, the U.S. must first look internally and address its government's inadequacies.

The research for this task force was conducted during the initial weeks of the second Trump administration. As a result, there were challenges from the direct impact his campaign's censorship efforts had on academic sources covering climate change, adaptation, accountability,

¹¹⁴ Guri, "The United States: Conditions for Accelerating Decarbonisation in a Politically Divided Country."

¹¹⁵ Guri.

responsibility, and attribution. This is a direct correlation to the content written in this section, exemplifying the need for the environment sector in grand strategy.

Agriculture

Agriculture is vital for both the health and well-being of Americans and the planet. However, the U.S. agriculture sector presents significant environmental and public health challenges, from greenhouse gas emissions to harmful carcinogens in the food supply. Current agricultural practices contribute to soil and water pollution, biodiversity loss, and long-term ecological damage. Despite corporate lobbying efforts that resist reform, urgent action is required to mitigate these harms. Agricultural production is central to the U.S. economy, increasing the importance of addressing these issues swiftly and properly. There are clear steps that the U.S. can take to address the harm the agricultural sector causes. The U.S. needs to take those steps to create a more sustainable agricultural production method to prevent further harm to the environment and look into the future in terms of adapting to a changed climate and world. Addressing these challenges is not only a national imperative but also a necessary step toward aligning with global sustainability initiatives and taking responsibility for the environmental consequences of agricultural production.

Energy

The power sector is a major contributor to global emissions, accounting for 25% of the U.S.'s domestic emissions in 2022.¹¹⁶ Worldwide, committed emissions from fossil fuel projects already surpass the carbon budget allotted to limit rising temperatures below 1.5°C and 2°C above industrial levels. Countries urgently need to accelerate their renewable energy transitions,

¹¹⁶ EPA, "Sources of Greenhouse Gas Emissions."

cease new leasing for fossil fuel projects, and decommission existing ones to maintain global temperatures below the Paris Agreement limits. As green transformations progress globally, countries dominating the clean technology supply chain will have growing influence and power on an international scale. Both the U.S. and China have progressed significantly in their renewable energy transitions. However, China dominates a substantial portion of the resources and supply chains pertaining to the clean energy transition, presenting as a genuine competitor to the U.S. market. As major emitters, the U.S. and China have a responsibility to support the global clean energy transition with competition and collaboration. While competition incentivizes research and development of crucial technology, cooperation creates pressures to meet emission standards, stabilizes geopolitical tensions, and provides far-reaching support for this transition.

International Cooperation

The United States is a world leader in its own right. With its prowess across sectors from military to economic, the country has an abundance of resources to remain dominant in the international arena. As of recently, there has been a lack of emphasis on taking into account the perception and reputation of the U.S. from the rest of the world. Leadership requires accountability and transparency, something the United States has not maintained in establishing a consistent narrative in addressing climate change domestically and internationally. This requires reforming the domestic attitude when discussing climate change, both from American citizens and legislators. With this change in domestic attitude can come a committed investment into the green energy transition and the development of renewable energy sources such as solar and wind, an investment that has proven to be lucrative and effective for the American people and economy. It behooves the United States to reform its perception of climate change as if it

does not, there are risks it will fall behind in this race to lead the green energy transition, one that is already being dominated by other international competitors.

As a major emitter and world leader, the United States has a responsibility to hold itself accountable for addressing climate change domestically, in the agricultural and energy sectors, and internationally. Should the United States aim to maintain its place as a global leader, it must aim to depoliticize climate change initiatives and create bipartisan support for durable policies transcending individual administrations.

Why the U.S. Needs Sustainable Agricultural Practices

Agriculture is essential for global food production and a critical pillar of the U.S. economy. It sustains human life through trade and supports the global supply chain. However, agriculture is also a major contributor to environmental degradation, impacting biodiversity, harming water and soil quality, and emitting greenhouse gases. Addressing these challenges is necessary for ensuring the long-term sustainability of both the agricultural sector and the environment. The agriculture sector of the United States operates under constant strain, balancing increasing production demands with evolving environmental and safety standards implemented by the government, labor shortages, and market pressure. The national economy and the function of American society heavily rely on the efficient and sustainable production of agricultural goods.¹¹⁷

Agriculture plays an important role in the proposed United States grand strategy. Agriculture has a directly linked impact on the health and well-being of Americans while also playing a significant role in U.S. trade relationships with other nations. In addition, climate change and environmental pollution are directly tied to agricultural production and have damaging effects on human health. Other nations have seen the need to reduce this harm. The United States can follow their lead by making agriculture a priority in the United States' grand strategy, specifically through three specific components of agriculture: agricultural production, biodiversity, and sustainable agriculture. Partisan divides cannot sideline policies addressing agricultural sustainability; they must prioritize the well-being of farmers, communities, and the broader population.

¹¹⁷ B. Hamuda, E. Hosam, & I. Patkó. "Relationship Between Environmental Impacts and Modern Agriculture."

Therefore, the priorities of the United States within the topic of agriculture are: 1) Reduce the presence of pesticides and fertilizers in water sources, 2) Increase the support given to farmers, 3) Reduce the Greenhouse Gas Emissions related to the agricultural sector, and 4) Improve the health of the American people.

Agricultural Production

The production of agricultural goods, including livestock and produce, is vital to the United States' economy and food security. However, several challenges place the U.S. behind its global allies and competitors in terms of production quality, quantity, and impact on the environment. Compared to other countries, the U.S. is ranked fourth after India, China, and Brazil for the most GHG emissions from livestock and crop production. In other regions of the world rapid development impacts the emissions, making them drastically higher than the U.S.'s. Africa and Asia have far higher numbers of agricultural greenhouse gases.¹¹⁸ The U.S. system of producing livestock harms the environment through the release of greenhouse gasses and the contamination of agricultural waste, affecting soil and water quality. Agricultural production in the United States utilizes products like fertilizers and pesticides to assist in the growth of produce, which harms ecosystems and poses health risks to those exposed. This harm is exacerbated by corporate lobbying efforts, such as the failure to stop the exportation of banned pesticides due to opposition from chemical manufacturers.¹¹⁹ The following paragraphs will explore the process of agricultural production and the negative effects on the environment and health of Americans through the topics of livestock production, agricultural goods production, and the use and application of genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

¹¹⁸ FAO, "Emissions due to agriculture: Global, regional and country trends 2000–2018."

¹¹⁹ N. Donley & R. Bullard, "U.S. pesticide regulation is failing the hardest-hit communities. It's time to fix it."

Livestock production contributes the most to greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) out of all agricultural processes.¹²⁰ Of the different types of livestock production, beef and dairy production accounted for 87% of the 274 MMT of GHG emissions in 2018. The majority of these GHGs are methane gas, which is produced by the unique digestive process of cattle, sheep, and goats. While other livestock such as swine and horses produce methane gas, cattle emit the majority due to consumer popularity and the nature of their production. The amount of methane gas produced by cattle is especially heightened by the low-quality feed which is high in fiber but low in protein. The low-quality feed is harder to digest for the cattle, leading to greater amounts of methane gas produced by their digestive systems.¹²¹ Scientists heavily encourage a reduction of 45% of the emissions from methane gas globally in order to combat climate change.¹²² Since cattle are a main contributor and cause of methane gas emissions, these scientists recommend actions such as improving the feed quality by adding additives that aid in digestion, taking care of the health of cattle through breeding programs, and updating the management of manure through the method of storage. Instead of being stored in barns for long periods of time, manure can be stored in specialized storage facilities with improved airflow and anaerobic digesters that speed up the breakdown of organic matter. Unfortunately, aerobic digesters are difficult to transport, and these methods are expensive. Thus, it is more productive to address methane emissions from the livestock instead of their byproducts.¹²³ Livestock production causes more than just GHG emissions, it also causes air pollution which harms nearby communities. These pollutants include bacteria, organic material from the bedding, inorganic material such as

¹²⁰ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Greenhouse Gas Inventory: 1990-2018*.

¹²¹ United States Department of Agriculture.

¹²² GAIA, *Methane Matters*.

¹²³ GAIA.

components of ammonia, and other organic materials. These have an impact on the human populations that are both directly and indirectly in contact with these pollutants. The aerosols are breathed in by those working in or near the farms, causing damage to their airway and lungs. Studies have shown that respiratory illnesses, such as pneumonia or chronic respiratory infections, are more common in areas where there is large-scale livestock production, including both cattle and avian production.¹²⁴ Livestock production has negative impacts on the environment, the people who work it, those who live close to large farms, and every person who is or will be harmed by the negative effects of climate change. However, livestock production is not the only part of agriculture that has a negative impact on health and the environment.

The production of agricultural goods and produce is an intense process that causes harm to the environment and people through pollutants. The two main pollutants come from the use of fertilizers and pesticides. After livestock production, crop production is the next largest agricultural source of GHG emissions in the United States, which is in line with global trends.¹²⁵ This is made up primarily of nitrous oxide, which comes from the decomposition of organic materials, nitrification, and denitrification of soils, which is increased through the use of fertilizers. Intense farming practices also increase the amount of nitrous oxide produced.¹²⁶ Crops that are planted in rows, such as corn, produce the most nitrous oxide due to their need for fertilization and this affects these crops in the soil after long-term use. Improvements to the production of crops to reduce the amount of nitrous oxide being produced include minimal use of fertilizers, improvements to irrigation systems, and timing fertilization with weather events.

¹²⁴ Lidwein A. M. Smit & Dick Heederik, “Impacts of Intensive Livestock Production on Human Health in Densely Populated Regions.”

¹²⁵ United States Department of Agriculture.

¹²⁶ United States Department of Agriculture.

Although weather patterns can be unpredictable, the first two recommendations should be the primary focus.¹²⁷ Changing to high-productivity irrigation systems will reduce GHG emissions, increase profit for farmers, and enable high crop productivity, as seen in a case study in the Yaqui Valley, Mexico. In the study, the relationship between the overuse of nitrogen-based fertilizer and overwatering showed how yields are diminished. Through an experiment where the fertilizer was used in different levels, all lower than those used ordinarily in the same region to match the need of the wheat, yields increased, and the cost to the farmer to grow the crops decreased. The treated fields increased yields by anywhere between seventeen and seventy-six percent. The higher yields are associated with lower treatment levels of nitrogen-based fertilizer.¹²⁸ In addition to harm to yields, the cycle of crop production causes harm to the soil, which is why fertilizers are needed in the first place. Changing the methods of production to include crop rotation and soil care will also benefit the growth of crops without causing environmental harm.¹²⁹ A reduction in fertilizer use would also benefit human health, as fertilizers can contaminate the very food sources they help grow, causing stomach issues in consumers. There is also evidence to suggest that inorganic fertilizers can cause cancers among farmers and those exposed to them. This contamination can come from being exposed from the source, pollution in waterways, or from the produce itself.¹³⁰ Fertilizers are not the only pollutant

¹²⁷ United States Department of Agriculture.

¹²⁸ Neville Millar, Abisaf Urrea, Kevin, Kahmark, Iurii Shcherbak, G. Philip Robertson, Ivan Ortiz-Monasterio, "Nitrous Oxide (N₂O) Flux Responds Exponentially to Nitrogen Fertilizer in Irrigated Wheat in the Yaqui Valley, Mexico."

¹²⁹ Bauddh, Kuldeep, Sanjeev Kumar, Rana Pratap Singh, and John Korstad, *Ecological and Practical Applications for Sustainable Agriculture*.

¹³⁰ Christos F. Tagkas, Evangelos C. Rizos, Georgios Markozannes, Maria A. Karalexi, Lydia Wairegi, and Evangelia E. Ntzani, "Fertilizers and Human Health—A Systematic Review of the Epidemiological Evidence."

used in agriculture, pesticides and herbicides also have many negative health and environmental risks.

The United States uses more than one billion pounds of pesticides each year to aid in the growth of produce.¹³¹ Scientific studies have shown that nearly every American faces exposure to pesticides, including children. Many pesticides or herbicides, notably the brand Roundup, contain the chemical glyphosate which has been linked to cancer, with the World Health Organization labeling the chemical as “probably carcinogenic.”¹³² Glyphosate has been fully or partially banned in Germany, France, the Netherlands, and other European states, with the EU considering banning it for all member countries.¹³³ The impact on communities is also disproportional by race. White Americans are less likely to be exposed to pesticides compared to Black and Latino communities. Proximity to the production of goods where pesticides are used or produced, and the consumption of these goods cause these higher levels of exposure in communities of color. Further harm is caused by the leaching of these chemicals into soils and water systems, making water sources unclean and polluting aquatic ecosystems.¹³⁴ Exposure levels to harmful chemicals used in pesticides or herbicides can be reduced by making organic produce more available, ending the production of pesticides near populated areas, and reducing the use of pesticides in the production of goods. Americans do not deserve to be at risk for illness because of the growth of the food they rely on.

Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) have become more popular in the United States, although their use is contentious because of the possible negative effects they can have on the

¹³¹ N. Donley & R. Bullard, “U.S. pesticide regulation is failing the hardest-hit communities. It's time to fix it.”

¹³² Kate Gibson, “Weed Killing Chemical Found in Majority of U.S. Urine Samples.”

¹³³ Eufic, “Is Glyphosate Banned in the EU Due to its Harmful Effect, or Not?”

¹³⁴ N. Donley & R. Bullard.

environment and human health. GMOs do have potential benefits to the production of goods, by creating crops that are resistant to pests or diseases, improving crop yield, thus increasing profit. The strength of these GMOs can also reduce the need for pesticides, which as explored in the previous paragraph, is beneficial to the health of consumers and farmers. It can also make them drought-resistant, protecting food sources.¹³⁵ However, there are also negatives to the use of GMOs. GMOs reduce biodiversity, which has negative impacts on the health of ecosystems as explained in the following section. There have been instances of GMOs causing health impacts from toxic substances leading to muscle pain and even death in some cases in Spain in 1983 from rapeseed oil derived from GMOs. Throughout the course of GMO use, there have also been cases of allergic reactions because of proteins used in the GMOs that are also common allergens, such as a case where soy was modified using brazil nuts, which is a common allergen. In rodents, genetically modified maize led to the growth of tumors.¹³⁶ In the United States, three government agencies oversee the development and regulation of GMOs: the FDA, the EPA, and the U.S.DA. They work together under the Coordinated Framework for the Regulation of Biotechnology. While some products containing GMOs are required to have labels indicating that, not all products are. In order to ease the public's mind on their consumption of GMOs, the U.S. government should label all products containing GMOs along with warnings about possible cross-contamination. The government should also allow transparency in this process to show the safety of GMOs and where improvements to the approval process can be made. The FDA already works to safeguard the public from harmful ingredients.¹³⁷ This can be added to the

¹³⁵ Bauddh, Kuldeep, Sanjeev Kumar, Rana Pratap Singh, and John Korstad.

¹³⁶ Bauddh, Kuldeep, Sanjeev Kumar, Rana Pratap Singh, and John Korstad.

¹³⁷ FDA, "How GMOs Are Regulated in the United States."

agency's tasks. Following the factual evidence, it is simple to remove the issues of polarity and political disagreement by allowing the FDA to lead the research and approval process of GMOs.

Biodiversity

Biodiversity is important to the health of the earth but is greatly affected by current agricultural practices. Biodiversity can be defined by the “overall richness” of species in a given area, the genetic diversity of a being or location, and even the diversity of services an ecosystem provides.¹³⁸ The need for land for agricultural production causes habitat loss and fragmentation, decreasing the genetic diversity of affected organisms. Genetic diversity is necessary for the health of an ecosystem along with the survival of the species. The homogeneity of crops is also an issue within the realm of biodiversity because of the necessity of human intervention and the rarity of finding anything similar in nature. Biodiversity is the life force of Earth, and a loss of biodiversity means vulnerability to food sources and the extinction of plants and animals, many of which are necessary for human survival.¹³⁹ Biodiversity and its negative effects on it are human-caused and driven through processes such as land use changes. The designation of land and land-use laws contribute to biodiversity loss. Human activities, including pollution of soil and water sources, threaten vulnerable ecosystems and at-risk organisms. Biodiversity loss can increase the likelihood of natural disasters, including landslides, which further endanger both wildlife and human populations. Effective conservation efforts are essential to mitigate these harms, preserving ecosystems and ensuring long-term environmental stability.

The use of land for agricultural purposes is the largest cause of habitat loss in the United States. It is responsible for the loss of ecosystems, biological diversity, and conservation efforts.

¹³⁸ Roy Haines-Young, “Land Use and Biodiversity Relationships.”

¹³⁹ B. Hamuda, E. Hosam, & I. Patkó.

While land management can contribute to the loss of biodiversity, it also has the potential to support conservation efforts. Deforestation is a common practice in the United States and globally in order to make space for agricultural production. Brazil is a prime example of this, with the Amazon Rainforest facing a significant loss of land to agriculture. Internationally, land loss is also great although developing nations see a greater change because of the transition of land for food production. South America sees the greatest amount of GHG emissions from land change largely due to the continuing deforestation efforts. The increase in agricultural production in Africa has the same impact because of the need for land.¹⁴⁰ Human activities cause biodiversity loss through the changes placed on natural ecosystems through farming, industrialization, and human-induced fires. This impact is relational to the degree of modification and the amount of goods produced by a farm. Land can be multi-functional. Returning homogenous farms and land usage by agricultural means to be heterogeneous and introducing transitional land between different land types can minimize the reduction of biodiversity in the United States.¹⁴¹ This “appropriation” of land through human activities, largely production-based, accounts for approximately 72 percent of the loss of natural ecosystems. One of the results of this need for land is deforestation.¹⁴²

Deforestation has caused further damage to biodiversity and the health of those impacted. Forests have great importance to the health of the planet, playing a large role in creating and maintaining biodiversity. Forests are necessary for the sequestration of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and into the soil. Protecting forest diversity is one way to fight the impacts of climate

¹⁴⁰ FAO.

¹⁴¹ Brian Machovina, Kenneth J. Feeley, William J. Ripple, “Biodiversity Conservation: The key is Reducing Meat Consumption”

¹⁴² Roy Haines-Young.

change induced by the emission of greenhouse gases.¹⁴³ Other issues stem from deforestation, including the loss of soil biodiversity and an increase in the potential for landslides. Forests allow a healthy microbiome of bacteria, fungi, and archaea to thrive, which allows for the soil to enable the carbon and nitrogen cycles to occur while aiding in the decomposition of organic matter. In the aftermath of deforestation, soil microbiomes lost much of their capacity to capture carbon, especially when the deforested land was turned into cropland. There is also a loss of soil nitrogen, which makes the effect of the use of fertilizers greater on the environment. Soil also becomes loose and susceptible to landslides when the root systems from trees are removed. In Oregon, landslides were larger and more devastating in clear-cut areas.¹⁴⁴ Deforestation poses a danger to biodiversity both above and below ground. It also makes humans more at risk of climate change and disasters such as landslides.

Conservation efforts are necessary to protect the health of the land, wildlife, and people in the United States and the rest of the world. Human activities have disrupted ecosystems, leading to species extinction and habitat destruction. Protecting the lands and species put at risk aids in the restoration of the ecological balance while providing mental and physical health benefits. Studies indicate that college students benefit from taking time in nature to reduce stress levels.¹⁴⁵ In addition, the conservation of species is also important for human survival. Many species that are endangered are necessary for the survival of ecosystems and the maintenance of them, but some are necessary for human life to continue. The honeybee is one of these species.

¹⁴³ T.W. Crowther, D.S. Maynard, J.W. Leff, E.E. Oldfield, R.L. McCulley, N. Fierer, and M.A. Bradford, “Predicting the Responsiveness of Soil Biodiversity to Deforestation: A Cross-Biome Study.”

¹⁴⁴ Christiane Runyan and Paolo D’Odorico, “Irreversibility and Ecosystem Impacts.” Chapter 4 In *Global Deforestation*.

¹⁴⁵ Eric Windhorst & Allison Williams, “Bleeding at the Roots: Post-Secondary Student Mental Health and Nature Affiliation.”

Honeybees are responsible for the majority of pollination. Without them, the food supply would end. Honeybees are endangered because of human activity such as the domestication of honeybees and the use of chemicals like pesticides in agricultural production. Steps can be taken to address this, including the conservation and protection of native honeybee populations.¹⁴⁶ The loss of ecosystems and the pollution made by human activity all harm natural biodiversity and the efforts to protect them. Land protection and conservation efforts are being made in the U.S. through protected lands, national parks, wildlife refuges, and more. While this helps protect many endangered species, the destruction of natural environments is the primary problem. Around two million acres are lost each year.¹⁴⁷ Land conservation efforts exist around the world as well. The 30x30 project is an international conservation project to conserve 30 percent of the world's lands, freshwater, and oceans by 2030. This was adopted by more than 190 countries in 2022 as part of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. These targets are still feasible with dedication from all nations.¹⁴⁸ Under the Biden Administration, the 30x30 project was a priority and the administration made many actions toward increasing the land and water conserved in the U.S. During his time in office, Biden increased the number of protected lands and waters by one percent. These efforts are likely to backslide thanks to the Trump Administration. Part of Project 2025 advocated for the stop of any conservation efforts that continue the U.S. toward its 30x30 goals.¹⁴⁹ The United States could continue to lead this effort by expanding protected lands and recommitting to the 30x30 project. The natural world is

¹⁴⁶ Fabrice Requier, Lionel Garnery, Patrick L Kohl, Henry K Njovu, Christian W.W Pirk, Robin M Crewe, and Ingolf Steffan-Dewenter, "The Conservation of Native Honey Bees Is Crucial."

¹⁴⁷ H. Ken Cordell, Carter J. Betz, & Stanley J. Zarnoch, "Recreation and Protected Land Resources in the United States: A Technical Document Supporting the Forest Service 2010 RPA Assessment."

¹⁴⁸ The Nature Conservancy, "Why We Are Committing to 30x30."

¹⁴⁹ Oliver Milman, "America the Beautiful: How Biden is Conserving land and Water as Trump Looms."

precious and once destroyed, is very difficult to restore to its former glory. This is the start of the steps the United States can take towards environmental protection and sustainability.

Sustainable Agriculture

Achieving sustainability in the agricultural sector may appear challenging. However, utilizing sustainable methods in agriculture will improve public health, reduce strain on farmers, and increase the level of production. The United States can adopt strategies from regions across the globe that have invested in and engineered new methods of agricultural production in order to be more sustainable and efficient. Reducing strain on the land can make farming more sustainable. Animal health can also be improved, and there are new ways to reduce pollution in different agricultural production types. This goes back to the type and quality of feed used on cattle. New technology also plays an important role in becoming a more sustainable nation, as it adds beneficial outcomes of aiding the farmers directly. There are also ways in which state actors can further develop rural areas in order to make rural life better for farmers. This can include education programs for farmers on these new technologies, and how to best utilize them. The U.S. can further its efforts to help the world by working with the international community towards these goals.

Sustainable farming practices are important for the fight against climate change, the health of Americans, and the efficiency of farmers. There are many ways to improve sustainability in the agricultural sector as they relate to the issues explored above. In dry regions, such as California, droughts already occur in the summers. With a hotter climate in the future, droughts will increase in frequency and intensity and the conservation of water will gain importance. Reducing the amount of water used in agricultural practices is one way to conserve a significant amount of water. One way to reduce the amount of water needed in hot climates is to

protect soil through conservation tilling, i.e. minimal tilling to preserve the microbial biodiversity, crop rotation, and increase the use of mulch.¹⁵⁰ Agricultural production can also become more environmentally and health-friendly through different methods regarding pesticides and fertilizers. While the science around pesticides still has improvements to be made, there are natural and organic options to use instead of inorganic and man-made ones. Contrary to this, fertilizers are becoming more available in other forms that make them more efficient and reduce the harm to human health and the environment. These include biofertilizers, which contain microbes to aid in soil health, green manure, which is derived from plants and releases nitrogen slowly into the soil, preventing leaching, and other slow-release fertilizers.¹⁵¹ Buffer zones for crops treated with pesticides can also prevent leaching. The European Union is in favor of buffer zones in order to protect at-risk communities and cross contamination with organic produce.¹⁵² These are merely some of the steps the U.S. government can take to transition towards sustainable agriculture production practices. Other possibilities in alternative fuel sources for agricultural operations and aquaculture. Ways to make agriculture more sustainable are still needed. The science remains unclear on some issues, especially for pesticides and fertilizers. Federal funding can be used to encourage research on these topics to assist in the transition.

The development of rural areas to include the utilization and integration of new technologies will substantially benefit farmers. Technology is currently improving, and new innovations are available to assist and facilitate the transition towards sustainable agriculture.

¹⁵⁰ Mahdi, Sheraz, Syed, & Singh, Rajbir, “Innovative Approaches for Sustainable Development : Theories and Practices in Agriculture.”

¹⁵¹ Bauddh, Kuldeep, Sanjeev Kumar, Rana Pratap Singh, and John Korstad.

¹⁵² European Commission, “Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Sustainable Use of Plant Protection Products and Amending Regulation (EU) 2021/2115.”

However, one issue that exists is the implementation of these technologies. Farmers have a difficult time learning how to use advanced technology, like digitalization or new equipment to harvest, store, or grow products, and have minimal resources available to assist them. One method for increasing the availability of this knowledge is through digitalization. Digitalization in the world of agriculture is a process where digital technology is used to streamline the production of goods using models and services to improve efficiency. It can solve problems through data analysis. This model can prevent food shortages, improve productivity, and increase sustainability. The digitization system can do this through analysis of complex issues like weather, the specific crop, and the need for specific fertilizers or pesticides. It can tell the farmer when to water their crops and when to harvest based on weather patterns such as precipitation and temperature trends. However, farmers either have issues affording the system or do not understand how to use it.¹⁵³ The United States can create a fund to assist farmers in the purchase of digitalization software. The policy can also be utilized to create free educational classes to teach these farmers how to use digital technology and other sustainable methods.

International cooperation will give the United States more resources to obtain a sustainable future. It will also give us a platform to recommend certain technologies or procedures that can help the rest of the world. While the U.S. begins addressing the agriculture issues addressed in this section, the U.S. also needs to come together with the international community to combat climate change. The U.S. has an important supply chain from its production of agricultural goods. This supply chain, however, is easily impacted by global events that put the U.S. economy at risk. Heavy disruptions occurred because of the COVID-19 pandemic, including food waste, food shortages, and high prices. The U.S. needs to protect its

¹⁵³ Deepesh Bista, “The Evolution and Impact of Digital Agriculture: Navigating the Future of Farming.”

food supply chain from these disrupters.¹⁵⁴ The digitalization techniques explained above will help, although more economic policy is necessary to ensure the supply chain has safeguards to prevent future issues. There are also cases of food waste because of differences in produce standards.¹⁵⁵ A way to prevent this is for the U.S. to work with its trade partners to create a combined standard for agricultural products. This will improve its ability to export goods as well, as many countries have stricter standards. Changing the production methods to be more sustainable will also assist in this. Sustainable practices are being achieved in the EU thanks to its CAP plan. The Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) is an EU-wide system that assists EU members in their agriculture production, sustainability efforts, and rural development. Each EU member creates a CAP Strategic Plan that they submit to the EU, which is then evaluated based on its compliance with EU standards.¹⁵⁶ Adopting a similar system where each state in the U.S. creates a plan, allowing for the bipartisan creation of actions that will benefit the specific needs of the agriculture sector of each state.

Conclusion

Agriculture is a subject complicated by its relationship to other topics that are heavily politicized in the U.S. and the world. The harm agriculture production causes should not be overlooked because of the polarization that exists. Instead, the U.S. needs to understand the real people and the real impacts agriculture has instead of remaining within party lines. There are other benefits to this besides protecting the health of the planet and people, including strengthening trade relationships and proving that the U.S. is capable of taking responsibility for

¹⁵⁴ Noé J Nava, William Ridley, and Sandy Dall’erba, “A Model of the U.S. Food System: What Are the Determinants of the State Vulnerabilities to Production Shocks and Supply Chain Disruptions?”

¹⁵⁵ G.P Nabhan, “Crops from U.S. Food Supply Chains Will Never Look nor Taste the Same Again.”

¹⁵⁶ European Commission, “The Common Agriculture Policy at a Glance.”

its actions. It can further this through international cooperation. Many organizations are working to better the world from issues that include climate change. An example is UNICEF, which promotes the well-being of children. In terms of the environment, UNICEF advocates and works for the preservation of the natural environment, including biodiversity loss and accessibility of safe produce.¹⁵⁷ Climate change is a threat to the future. Action to prevent worse effects must be taken now and in the near future actions must be taken to mitigate the effects as they occur.

U.S. Agriculture Policy Options

- I. Reduce fertilizer & pesticide use, especially near populated areas**
- II. Invest in R&D for Sustainable agricultural practices**
- III. Create education programs for new technologies**
- IV. Recommit to the 30X30 project**

¹⁵⁷ UNICEF, “Climate Change and the Environment.”

The Race Towards Clean Energy, a U.S.-China Competition

Climate Change and the Renewable Energy Transition

The power sector is a major contributor to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and exacerbates the climate crisis. Societies depend on a reliable energy supply for transportation, agriculture, manufacturing, and daily life. Since the Industrial Revolution, communities have relied on fossil fuels like oil, gas, and coal, generating an intense carbon lock-in that prioritizes high-carbon resources and poses a significant obstacle to the renewable energy transition.¹⁵⁸ The 2015 Paris Agreement committed signatory countries to reducing GHG emissions and containing rising global temperatures to 1.5°C, well below 2°C, above industrial levels. The renewable energy transition, or phase-out of fossil fuels in favor of clean energy, is a crucial component of this goal. It reduces environmental pollution, mitigates emission surges and environmental degradation, and contributes to economic growth.¹⁵⁹ However, the fossil fuel industry's developed deposit reserves, or existing and under-construction fossil fuel infrastructure, already exceed the remaining 1.5°C carbon budget. In 2018, committed emissions from these reserves were 60% larger than the 1.5°C budget and depleted 95% of the 2°C budget allotted to maintain a 50% and 83% probability of achieving these goals.¹⁶⁰ To limit rising temperatures under 2°C, governments must cease licensing for new fossil fuel projects in addition to decommissioning current ones. As the energy transition accelerates and demand for traditional energy declines, investments in fossil fuel infrastructure risk becoming stranded assets, leading to significant stakeholder capital loss.

¹⁵⁸ Trout et al., "Existing Fossil Fuel Extraction Would Warm the World beyond 1.5 °C."

¹⁵⁹ Guo and Wen, "Are China's Renewable Energy Products Competitive in the Context of RCEP?"

¹⁶⁰ Trout et al., "Existing Fossil Fuel Extraction Would Warm the World beyond 1.5 °C."

Another dimension of the renewable energy transition is its implications for the great powers and their future roles in the international arena. Globalization has deeply interconnected the world's economies because entry into the global trade market provides a one-way ticket to development and economic growth. Therefore, whichever country monopolizes the supply chain required for the energy transition will have incredible influence over the international system. Presently, China has made the most significant progress towards attaining this monopoly. It surpassed U.S. renewable energy investments in 2009, reaching a peak of \$148.4 billion in 2017, while the U.S. hit \$59 billion in 2019.¹⁶¹ Since then, China has maintained a quasi-monopoly on rare earth resource production and exports and expanded its investments to neighboring countries through projects like the Belt and Road Initiative. The U.S. has seemingly lagged behind China's mission-oriented investments, as its "ambition to deal with climate change has always depended on party politics."¹⁶² Frequently changing administrations and increasing partisan fragmentation have deeply politicized climate change and renewable energy transition, creating obstacles to the U.S.'s attempts at building momentum through climate-energy legislation.

As primary emitters, the U.S. and China are responsible for addressing climate change through genuine efforts to lower global emissions. Despite their long history of trade competition and exclusionist policies, climate change is a crisis that cannot be addressed in isolation. To carry out effective climate action, the U.S. and China must cooperate with other climate leaders and stimulate competition in the clean energy sector.

¹⁶¹ Geoffrey, "The United States–China Race for Green Transformation: Institutions, Incentives, and Green Industrial Policies."

¹⁶² Dejonghe, "Will Only a Green Power Remain Great Power?"

China's Clean Energy Momentum

China's thriving clean energy transition is characterized by an early entry into the global renewable energy market fueled by state intervention, protectionist policies, strong incentive structures, and transnational cooperation. China distinguished the energy transition as a high-level political priority in the early 2000s.¹⁶³ Its domestic climate policy commenced in late 2005 after facing significant air pollution and a desire to avoid internal instability. After recognizing renewable energy as an industry with great potential for global growth, China passed the 2006 Renewable Energy Law to set national renewable energy targets and feed-in tariffs.¹⁶⁴ Its 11th 5-year plan lifted climate change higher on the government agenda, establishing a 20% improvement target for energy efficiency per province. Their first global warming policy initiative, the 2007 National Climate Change Program, identified the country's climate change threats, policy efforts, and objectives.¹⁶⁵ To holistically prepare and invest in "industries of the future," President Xi Jinping increased universities' cooperation with enterprises to promote innovation and localization capabilities and transform this strategic industry's technology.¹⁶⁶ In the early 2000s, China signaled its deep understanding of the climate crisis' urgency, its recognition of GHG contributions, and its mission-oriented climate action efforts.

The 2008 global financial crisis proved transformative for China's progress towards climate leadership by incentivizing long-term investments in the green transformation. It spurred the central government to increase investments in green technology to address China's need for

¹⁶³ Geoffrey, "The United States–China Race for Green Transformation: Institutions, Incentives, and Green Industrial Policies."

¹⁶⁴ Oxford Institute For Energy Studies, "3: Short History of Chinese Climate Policy - Guide to Chinese Climate Policy."

¹⁶⁵ Oxford Institute For Energy Studies.

¹⁶⁶ Oxford Institute For Energy Studies; Geoffrey, "The United States–China Race for Green Transformation: Institutions, Incentives, and Green Industrial Policies."

re-entry into the global market.¹⁶⁷ The government identified and promoted a series of state-owned strategic renewable energy industries to boost the domestic green energy sector. With its 12th 5-year plan (2011-2015), China built momentum for the energy transition using green industrial policies that reduced manufacturing costs by encouraging cooperation, mergers, and acquisitions of foreign companies. These policies helped China's non-hydro renewable energy market shift from import-dominated to the largest in the world.¹⁶⁸ From 2006 to 2021, China's renewable energy trade market grew at a rate of 147.45%, while the U.S.'s growth rate stayed around 28.89% from 2007 to 2017.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, Chinese renewable energy product export competitiveness increased from 45.61% to 64.74% from the late 2000s to the early 2020s.¹⁷⁰ China dominates world exports of wind and solar power plant equipment and had 38.1% of global installed generating capacities in 2021 (compared to the U.S.'s 13.6%).¹⁷¹

China's early dedication to its energy transition and green technology market dominance prepares it well for global leadership. Its incentive structure for green industrial initiatives has minimized obstacles to support successful and efficient policy implementation. China's policy elites understood decarbonization efforts as a means of increasing market competitiveness against the West and provided strategic high-level support for green policies.¹⁷² Its use of renewable energy tariffs, government biddings, and multi-level economic incentives signaled an emphasis on strategic industry developments, encouraging private and public investments in

¹⁶⁷ Geoffrey, "The United States–China Race for Green Transformation: Institutions, Incentives, and Green Industrial Policies."

¹⁶⁸ Geoffrey.

¹⁶⁹ Guo and Wen, "Are China's Renewable Energy Products Competitive in the Context of RCEP?"; Shuai et al., "Renewable Energy Product Competitiveness: Evidence from the United States, China and India - ScienceDirect."

¹⁷⁰ Guo and Wen, "Are China's Renewable Energy Products Competitive in the Context of RCEP?"

¹⁷¹ Zhukov and Reznikova, "Energy Transition in the United States, Europe and China: Latest Trends."

¹⁷² Geoffrey, "The United States–China Race for Green Transformation: Institutions, Incentives, and Green Industrial Policies."

renewable market entrants. Furthermore, companies participating in government bidding required 50% of share ownership from Chinese shareholders and had a 70% local content requirement for local manufacturers. China's hierarchical incentive structures and low political costs of renewable energy development have reduced challenges from internal interest groups and streamlined policy implementation.¹⁷³ While China still relies heavily on coal generation, its renewable energy sector is "developing rapidly on its own production and technological base," with wind and solar energy making up 14% of electricity generation in 2022.¹⁷⁴ These protectionist trade measures and local content requirements supported the development of local clean energy supply chains and set China up for success in domestic and international markets.

Finally, China's transnational cooperation marks it as a strong competitor for climate leadership. President Xi Jinping has engaged in high-profile advocacy for the urgency of climate action and aims to prepare China as a climate leader.¹⁷⁵ Using the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, China provides loans to fund projects, 34% of which are energy-related, for its 110 members in predominantly Asian countries. China has also established the New Development Bank with BRICS countries to fund sustainable developments in the developing world.¹⁷⁶ The 2020 Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP) is a trade agreement between 15 Indo-Pacific countries seeking international energy cooperation to optimize their energy transitions. The RCEP gave China a new avenue for integration into the global energy system and ensured its energy security by making up a significant amount of

¹⁷³ Geoffrey.

¹⁷⁴ Zhukov and Reznikova, "Energy Transition in the United States, Europe and China: Latest Trends."

¹⁷⁵ Geoffrey, "The United States–China Race for Green Transformation: Institutions, Incentives, and Green Industrial Policies."

¹⁷⁶ Geoffrey.

China's "outbound energy investments."¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, China's 2013 Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has helped the country expand its influence over neighboring nations through cooperation on infrastructure development.¹⁷⁸ Though initially invested in "brown" fossil fuel industry developments, the BRI has gradually reformed to become an international green development coalition. In the late 2010s, China promoted Green BRI cooperation and investments, introduced new think tanks focused on green development, and integrated sustainability and ESG factors into corporate strategies.¹⁷⁹ The BRI countries are rich in solar energy resources, and their cooperation with China strengthens its "photovoltaic industry."¹⁸⁰ As countries increasingly depend on China's investments, it gains power and influence as a climate leader and renewable energy trailblazer.

The U.S.'s Green Transition Limitations

In contrast to China, the U.S.'s clean energy transition has faced challenges from competing interests, bipartisan fragmentation, and overly politicized climate legislation. While the U.S. is generally identified as a neoliberal, non-interventionist state with a free market environment, it has also discretely supported key industries and promoted technology modernization. Similarly, to its development of state institutions in military and pharmaceutical industries, the U.S. has nurtured clean energy technology through the 2007 Advanced Research Project Agency-Energy (ARPA-E).¹⁸¹ With the ARPA-E, the government has directly funded

¹⁷⁷ Guo and Wen, "Are China's Renewable Energy Products Competitive in the Context of RCEP?"

¹⁷⁸ Asia Society Policy Institute, "APPENDIX C: GREENING BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE: KEY INITIATIVES AND INVESTMENT GUIDELINES GREENING BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE: KEY INITIATIVES AND INVESTMENT GUIDELINES from China's Cooperation with Southeast Asia to Support an Ambitious Clean Energy Transition by 2030."

¹⁷⁹ Asia Society Policy Institute.

¹⁸⁰ Guo and Wen, "Are China's Renewable Energy Products Competitive in the Context of RCEP?"

¹⁸¹ Geoffrey, "The United States-China Race for Green Transformation: Institutions, Incentives, and Green Industrial Policies."

technology innovation for the energy transition. Like China, the U.S. has introduced protectionist trade and investment measures to promote its domestic energy market. Unlike China, the U.S.'s climate initiatives have largely depended on its current administration and bipartisan agreement.

The U.S.'s strategic state capacity to mobilize interest group support has lagged severely behind China. Because the oil and automobile industries have monopolized the market structure, new entrants into the energy market have struggled against conventional industrial actors.¹⁸² The conventional utility and traditional energy industries have lobbied against clean energy initiatives to avoid transaction costs of the energy transition. This tactic has created a pattern where bills addressing climate change only pass the U.S. Congress if fossil fuel interests are conceded to. Even the Biden Administration's prized IRA passed thanks to fossil fuel infrastructure expansions.¹⁸³ Further, Policymakers have balked at directly subsidizing clean energy research, development, and manufacturing in favor of indirect funding through tax credits, which have proved less than effective in boosting U.S. solar productivity or reducing emissions.¹⁸⁴ Common themes seen in successful bipartisan mobilization for clean energy initiatives include economic framing, concessions to fossil fuel interests, and a concern for energy security.

While the Clinton Administration supported environmental protection and industrial growth policies like the Climate Action Plan, its efforts to impose a general tax on energy forms to promote energy conservation were met with fervent opposition from Congress and industry stakeholders. Additionally, though President Bush's 2005 Energy Policy Act passed with bipartisan support and expanded loan guarantees for clean energy technology developments, it

¹⁸² Geoffrey.

¹⁸³ Fisher, "Chapter Two from Saving Ourselves: From Climate Shocks to Climate Action."

¹⁸⁴ Geoffrey, "The United States–China Race for Green Transformation: Institutions, Incentives, and Green Industrial Policies."

primarily focused on regulatory relief for oil and the gas fracking industry.¹⁸⁵ It's concessions to fossil fuel interests included exemptions from environmental assessments and loosened federal oversight of drilling operations. Due to a reluctant Republican Congress, President Obama turned to executive orders for clean energy decarbonization policies deviating from bipartisan themes. His 2015 Clean Power Plan aimed to decarbonize existing power plants by 32% below 2005 levels by 2030. However, the Trump administration revoked this executive order before it could make any substantial impact. Executive Orders have increased in popularity as political polarization restricts bipartisan legislation. Still, this strategy is controversial because it bypasses Congress's veto power and exacerbates polarization surrounding climate policy.¹⁸⁶

The quick turnover rate of U.S. administrations has produced a pattern of climate policy reversals with limited impact on national emission goals. Despite the four-year Presidential term, the recent popularity of policy repeals creates a "rollback whiplash" in presidential transitions that leaves the administration with a limited two years of productive legislation.¹⁸⁷ Regulation legacies in the final two years of administrations are jeopardized by tools like the Congressional Review Act (CRA), judicial abeyances, and suspensions, which have increased in popularity since President Trump's first term. These instruments allow Presidents to review, repeal, pause, change, or suspend previous rules and litigation over regulations. Both Trump and Biden administrations have taken unprecedented advantages of the "rollback toolkit," repealing numerous policies with the CRA and requesting late-stage abeyances.¹⁸⁸ This new focus on rolling back past legislation is foolishly counterproductive, costly in time and resources, and

¹⁸⁵ Guri, "The United States: Conditions for Accelerating Decarbonisation in a Politically Divided Country."

¹⁸⁶ Guri.

¹⁸⁷ Davis Noll and Revesz, "Presidential Transitions: The New Rules."

¹⁸⁸ Davis Noll and Revesz.

erodes the policy-making power of administrations. The U.S.'s climate-energy policy exemplifies rollback strategies and overall inefficiency across administrations.

During his first term, the Trump administration reversed much of the country's climate action progress, ended U.S. climate leadership, and halted climate cooperation with China. From 2016 to 2020, President Trump successfully rolled back 83 environmental regulations, rendering these policies, and countless others since 2007, inefficient and virtually impactless.¹⁸⁹ Further, he drastically increased subsidies and incentives for fossil fuel production and consumption, inconsistent with the global effort to limit rising temperatures. President Trump also attempted to cut funding for agencies supporting green growth, renewable energy technology, and low-carbon developments. He proposed 70-100% budget cuts every year since 2017, specifically targeting the DOE Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy and ARPA-E.¹⁹⁰ Thankfully, the Republican-controlled Congress vetoed these funding cuts, demonstrating the plausibility of bipartisan support for clean energy initiatives that support energy security.

In contrast, Biden's administration reclaimed the mantle of climate leadership and passed bold climate initiatives like the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). The IRA provides a series of incentives with \$400 billion worth of "long-term 'patient capital'" for cross-sector decarbonization technology industries" to incentivize new investments and market entries.¹⁹¹ It invested in the U.S.'s capacity to cut consumer energy costs, for the energy transition, address the climate crisis, and strengthen

¹⁸⁹ Guri, "The United States: Conditions for Accelerating Decarbonisation in a Politically Divided Country."

¹⁹⁰ Guri.

¹⁹¹ Geoffrey, "The United States–China Race for Green Transformation: Institutions, Incentives, and Green Industrial Policies."

energy security.¹⁹² Its incentive structure encourages private sector investments by providing tax credits, reducing minimum requirements, and extending project timelines to promote efficient market-based business models.¹⁹³ Additionally, these incentives drastically lower the costs of clean energy technology and spur domestic manufacturing with new national content requirements of 40-55% for government-supported projects starting in 2025-2028.¹⁹⁴ Two years after the IRA's passing, private investment in related technology and infrastructure increased by 73% (or \$493 billion), and it is expected to raise a total of \$1 trillion in government and private funding by 2030.¹⁹⁵ Though extremely meaningful for the energy transition, the IRA's momentum is threatened by the second Trump administration.

President Trump's 2nd term started with endless executive orders revoking the Biden administration's climate action. True to his pattern, President Trump's "Unleashing American Energy" executive order repealed several initiatives financing the energy transition.¹⁹⁶ This order froze funds from the IRA, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and the BIL, all of which provided public investments for clean technology development, carbon removal, clean hydrogen hub programs, electricity grid, and EV charging infrastructure, etc.¹⁹⁷ Though the Biden administration has obligated more than \$50 billion of IRA and BIL funds it outlaid less than \$20 billion, the rest of which stays under the control of Elon Musk's Department of Government

¹⁹² National Archives, "Federal Register :: Publication of a Report on the Effect of Imports of Neodymium-Iron-Boron (NdFeB) Permanent Magnets on the National Security: An Investigation Conducted Under Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962, as Amended."

¹⁹³ Zhukov and Reznikova, "Energy Transition in the United States, Europe and China: Latest Trends."

¹⁹⁴ Zhukov and Reznikova.

¹⁹⁵ Aston, Perkins, and RMI Staff, "On the Climate Bill's Second Birthday, Surging Successes — But a Split Reality - RMI."

¹⁹⁶ White House, "Unleashing American Energy – Executive Order."

¹⁹⁷ White House; Brazier et al., "How the U.S. Transition Policy Impacts Investing."

Efficiency.¹⁹⁸ While withholding obligated money is unlawful and breaches agency contracts, the funding freeze threatens numerous projects and jobs as payroll and loan requirements remain unpaid. At best, significant delays in funding disbursement will slow or ground renewable energy projects, at worst, President Trump’s cabinet threatens to withdraw obligated money and render the act a fraction of its intended impact.¹⁹⁹

Revitalizing U.S. Policy-Making

The U.S.’s fragmented political party system is a major obstacle to climate-energy legislation and hinders efforts to increase competitiveness against China’s renewable energy market. While executive orders have allowed administrations to bypass Congress, they delegitimize efforts to foster climate bipartisanship and are counterproductive in depoliticizing climate change. The U.S. must overcome the urge to roll back previous administration’s policies and instead promote national and state-level bipartisanship.

Climate change has become so politicized that policymakers veto sound initiatives simply due to the opposition’s support.²⁰⁰ However, bipartisan-supported climate policies have succeeded in Republican or divided states that overwhelmingly framed justice components in economic terms and didn’t restrict consumer choices.²⁰¹ The above analysis also highlights the importance of recognizing administration and stakeholder priorities, like energy security and traditional energy interests. When faced with inadequate government efforts, individual states must take advantage of their ability to pass productive state-level climate policies to advance the

¹⁹⁸ Bittle, “Trump Is Freezing Climate Funds. Can He Do That?”

¹⁹⁹ Bittle.

²⁰⁰ Marshall and Burgess, “Advancing Bipartisan Decarbonization Policies: Lessons from State-Level Successes and Failures | Climatic Change.”

²⁰¹ Marshall and Burgess.

energy transition. Republican and divided states' focus on reframing climate-energy policies economically can provide bottom-up efforts to rebuild bipartisan collaboration and facilitate the energy transition. Simultaneously, Democratic states' focus on ambitious climate-energy policies can preserve some momentum from the IRA and BIL. Pioneer climate-energy legislation can be learned from and inspire state, and federal, efforts to pursue similar policies. Since 2002, California has mandated stricter-than-federal automobile emission regulations and successfully encouraged 13 states to follow its lead.²⁰² Additionally, a 2019 Colorado state law establishing GHG emission impact assessment reports influenced 2020 Congressional leaders to release their own Carbon Cost Act proposal.²⁰³

To create truly impactful, durable climate-energy policies, the federal government must first limit, within reason, the new administration's abilities to erase its predecessor's efforts. The Trump and Biden administrations' irresponsible use of rollback toolkits limit the productivity of policymaking in an already inefficiently short administration period. Furthermore, the government can depoliticize climate change by reframing policies to address administration priorities aligned with the urgency of climate action. Traditional energy stakeholders hold unjustifiable and disproportionate sway over legislation and risk the U.S.'s future international status and national security for fear of bearing transition costs. The federal government should emphasize the economic justice component of the energy transition to gradually increase the fossil fuel sector's capacity for adaptation without conceding to more projects than necessary for energy security. Taking ownership of the long-term energy transition rather than conceding to short-term fossil fuel interests is a crucial component of U.S. national security, avoiding

²⁰² Guri, "The United States: Conditions for Accelerating Decarbonisation in a Politically Divided Country."

²⁰³ Marshall and Burgess, "Advancing Bipartisan Decarbonization Policies: Lessons from State-Level Successes and Failures | Climatic Change."

overinvesting in assets that may become stranded. It will allow the government to responsibly lean on fossil fuels and maintain energy security while supporting bold incentives to increase the domestic supply and demand capacity for the energy transition. This simultaneous top-down and bottom-up approach to climate-energy legislation can ensure the momentum of the clean energy transition transcends any individual administration.

China's Relationship with U.S. Allies

Like the U.S. and China, the E.U. is working to progress its energy transition. The E.U.-U.S. partnership has long driven global economic growth and addressed geopolitical tensions to maintain peace and stability. This alliance is key to efficiently tackling global challenges like climate change and inspiring countries to follow their lead. To fulfill global climate goals, the U.S. and E.U. must promote “open, transparent, competitive, and sustainable solutions” and cooperate on research and technological development.²⁰⁴ However, as the E.U. advances its energy transition, its gradual independence from Russia may shift to dependence on China.

Climate change has accelerated Arctic melting, opening it to renewed great power competitions that impact U.S. national security interests. China's interests have also shifted to the Arctic, where natural resource extractions and international trade channels have the potential to further their goals of aligning the global system to their interests.²⁰⁵ Reinvigorated activity in the Arctic allows China to “leverage changing dynamics...to pursue greater influence and access” through investments in infrastructure and natural resources.²⁰⁶ Furthermore, Sino-Russian collaboration has deepened as an isolated Russia seeks financing for its natural gas production,

²⁰⁴ EEAS, “The European Union and the United States.”

²⁰⁵ Waller, “(U) PRC Economic Activity in the Arctic: Implications and Opportunities for the United States and Europe | Policy Commons.”

²⁰⁶ DOD, “2024 Arctic Strategy.”

80% of which comes from the Arctic. The U.S.'s current strategy is to monitor and respond to the region through intelligence collection, enhanced ally cooperation, and deterrence of joint force.²⁰⁷ The Arctic also has potential for the E.U.'s energy transitions and hydrocarbon decoupling. The European Commission believes the 2021 energy crisis was caused by the insufficient speed of the energy transition.²⁰⁸ So in 2022, it financed €300 billion for the REPowerEU. Plan to accelerate the clean transition by reducing energy consumption, increasing gas storage capacity, and diversifying its energy supplies.²⁰⁹ In two years, the E.U. has reduced its gas consumption by 18%, lowered its share of Russian gas imports to 15%, and increased its wind and solar capacity by 36%.²¹⁰ Despite this progress, the U.S. and the E.U. remain dependent on China for rare earth minerals (REE). Given China's lead in the energy transition, its rapprochement with Russia to obtain Arctic governance and access to natural resources should attract more U.S. attention. While enhancing collaboration amongst Allies is productive, the U.S. and its partners have the opportunity to pursue earnest cooperation with China to leverage its REE supply chain for the E.U.'s transition, pressure China to abandon coal projects, and divert its attention from Russia.

China's quasi-monopoly of rare earth minerals required for the green transformation started in 1990 when the "government classified REEs as 'protected and strategic minerals'."²¹¹ It's early entry into the REE industry and extensive investment in the entire supply chain. The late 1900s were spent researching and funding REE mining, processing, and reducing costs to

207 DOD.

208 Zhukov and Reznikova, "Energy Transition in the United States, Europe and China: Latest Trends."

209 European Commission, "REPowerEU. - Affordable, Secure and Sustainable Energy for Europe."

210 European Commission, "REPowerEU. - 2 Years On."

211 Andrews-Speed and Hove, "China's Rare Earths Dominance and Policy Responses."

out-compete other export producers. In 2020, China’s share of REE processing capacity was 90% of the global total, and its mining capacity was 70%. In contrast, European progress in REE supply chains has been slow. The 2023 Critical Raw Materials Act sets 2030 benchmarks of 10%, 40%, and 15% of mineral extraction, processing, and recycling to be done in the E.U. However, this act also set a 65% threshold for the annual consumption from a third country. Despite global efforts in 2022 and 2023 to decrease China’s REE competitiveness, it is “unlikely to dramatically limit China’s dominance over these supply chains in the near term.”²¹² China is the U.S.’s primary source of NdFeB magnet imports, a critical national security technology, increasing from 70-85% from 2016 to 2021.²¹³ While the U.S. is increasing its domestic capacity, it is still lacking at various steps of the magnet value chain. Despite the U.S. and E.U.’s efforts to counterbalance China’s dominance with the 2022 IRA and 2023 Critical Mineral Act, developing processing and production infrastructure is a lengthy process, and the E.U. and U.S. will maintain a degree of reliance on Chinese imports.²¹⁴ As countries work towards their energy transitions, the demand for REE will continue to rise and fuel China’s influence over the new energy market.

Cooperation or Competition?

The U.S.-China relationship has been characterized by cooperation and competition. The U.S.’s approach to this relationship will have profound implications for the domestic and international progress of renewable energy transitions, its status as a climate leader, and the overall impacts of climate change. While preserving U.S. relevance in the international arena is

²¹² Andrews-Speed and Hove.

²¹³ National Archives, “Federal Register :: Publication of a Report on the Effect of Imports of Neodymium-Iron-Boron (NdFeB) Permanent Magnets on the National Security: An Investigation Conducted Under Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962, as Amended.”

²¹⁴ National Archives.

important to protecting democracy and maintaining a stable global economy, it will benefit no country if the climate crisis worsens unchecked by joint climate action.

Prior to President Trump's first term, Xi Jinping signaled to the international community that China was dependable for climate action, regardless of U.S. election results.²¹⁵ Likely, this attitude will continue throughout President Trump's second term as well. Because of its government structure, China can implement domestic clean energy policies more efficiently than the U.S. Furthermore, China's early entry into REE processing and mining has supported its momentum in the energy transition and transnational infrastructure investments. Due to its dominance in the REE market, China has the capacity and responsibility to help further other countries' transition, and the U.S. has a responsibility to let it. Without China's support, Europe will struggle to decouple from Russia's fossil fuels and progress rapidly in its energy transition. Additionally, the expected demand increase for REEs is a valuable opportunity for the U.S. to expand its domestic supply and demand capacity. Like China, which has created a large domestic REE demand to progress its transition, the U.S. should boost its EV and wind turbine industry to increase its demand while continuing to invest in its own supply. Pursuing protectionist, market-based policies like the IRA can produce productive incentives to multiply clean energy funding from private investors. With a smart incentive structure influencing the supply and demand for renewable energy technologies and resources, the U.S. can gradually wean off Chinese REE supply chain dependence as it develops its own. Should the U.S. scorn collaboration with China, it risks falling behind in the energy transition and suffering as shifting energy demands affect market prices and hinder overdue efforts to hop on the trend. Leveraging Chinese imports to maintain stability in the U.S.'s own supply chain to focus on increasing its renewable energy

²¹⁵ Dejonghe, "Will Only a Green Power Remain Great Power?"

market competitiveness pays off in the long term by better preparing the U.S. for leadership in a clean energy-dominated world.

Furthermore, one of the U.S.'s strongest allies, the E.U., is racing to decouple from hydrocarbons and shift away from Russian independence. Encouraging the E.U. to cooperate with China creates an opportunity to not only accelerate the global energy transition, but also diplomatically interfere in the deepening Sino-Soviet relationship and incentivize China to decommission its coal projects. To protect the global community and create a world in which U.S. influence means anything at all, the E.U. and the U.S. should balance competition and cooperation with China. Integrating China into a joint effort in climate action will provide the necessary manpower needed to address climate change.

Conclusion

China has positioned itself at the head of the global energy shift and can help the world progress its renewable energy transition. Climate change is here; its impacts are already affecting countries worldwide, and the severity of its consequences will only increase in the next few decades. The U.S. has a responsibility to cooperate with China and advance the global energy transition while addressing its deeply fragmented party system and inefficient policy strategies. This collaboration can strengthen the U.S.'s ability to pursue meaningful green statecraft abroad and maintain its international relevance in the power sector. Further, the E.U.'s cooperation with China can quicken its energy transition, counter-balance Sino-Russian influence in the Arctic and persuade China to abandon coal projects. Using the right strategies, the U.S. can maintain influence in an increasingly multipolar world and collaborate to further the renewable energy transition.

Race Towards Clean Energy Policy Options

A Roadmap to Balanced Climate Action and Power Abroad

Depoliticize Climate-Energy Legislation

- I. Pursue economic justice framing for climate-energy policies to increase the traditional energy sector's capacity for the clean energy transition without conceding to unnecessary fossil fuel projects and reduced federal oversight.**
- II. Highlight how past renewable energy initiatives (like the IRA) have benefitted Republican States' economies to foster bipartisan sponsorship.**
- III. Pursue climate-energy legislation from both the state and federal levels to maximize community contributions, inspire new clean energy initiatives, and build a momentum that transcends individual federal administrations.**

Collaborate with China

- IV. Continue to lean on Chinese rare earth mineral (REE) imports to build momentum in the energy transition, protect energy security, and avoid exacerbating tensions that could hinder the global renewable energy transition's progress.**
- V. Encourage European Allies to collaborate with China on REE supply chains (until the U.S. builds more capacity), and influence China away from coal projects and deeper partnerships with Russia in the Arctic.**

Compete with China

- VI. Prioritize investments in the U.S.'s REE supply chain capacity using push and pull incentives to simultaneously stimulate REE supply and demand to grow a domestic market capable of gradually weaning off Chinese import dependence.**
- VII. Fund projects that incentivize private investments in renewable energy technology and infrastructure to increase U.S. renewable energy product competitiveness.**

The Responsibility of the United States in Addressing Climate Change

*“With great power comes
great responsibility”*

- Voltaire

The United States has a long history as an international leader, playing a vital role in landmark global events and decisions. This influence stems from its economic and military power, leadership in establishing international institutions, and role in shaping global norms and policies. Given this status, the United States and its government must hold itself to the same standards and expectations it sets for the rest of the world. The U.S. has a precedent to make declarations of standards of what other countries should adhere to regarding climate change initiatives and renewable energy efforts. Despite setting expectations for other nations, domestically, the U.S. falls short in adhering to its own guidelines, undermining its credibility and ability to influence global environmental policy. There must be domestic reform within the U.S. regarding the issue of climate change, both within the public and private sectors, before the country can continue to assert its dominance on the global stage in any capacity. With all its power, resources, and manpower, the United States has a duty to utilize its capabilities to its fullest extent to play its part in the international community to fight for environmentally conscious and sustainably driven policy and cooperation.

Climate Change Contribution Context

Extreme weather events do not abide by internationally drawn borders, nor do they differentiate between the socioeconomic status of those affected. The climate change crisis has garnered global attention from both citizens and governments. Protecting the environment must be prioritized in political agendas. Climate change should not be overlooked in establishing a

grand strategy or government legislature of any kind as it intersects with nearly every sector of society. Extensive data and scientific research make clear the magnitude of the United States' contribution to climate change. A study conducted at the University of East Anglia in the United Kingdom observed the attributions of global warming on countries around the world and found that “the largest contributors to global cumulative emissions of CO₂ during 1851-2022 were the USA (20.5%), the EU27 (11.7%), China (11.7%), Russia (7.0%), and Brazil (4.6%).”²¹⁶ The U.S. leads in emissions by almost double compared to the European Union, highlighting a stark disparity. “The top 10 contributors to global warming from their historical emissions of GHG during 1851-2022 are the USA (responsible for 17.0% of global warming due to GHG emissions; 0.28C), China (12.5%; 0.21C), the EU27 (10.3%; 0.17C, including Germany 2.9% and France 1.3%), Russia (6.3%; 0.11C), Brazil (4.9%; 0.081C), India (4.7%; 0.078C), Indonesia (3.7%; 0.061C), the United Kingdom (2.4%; 0.040C), Canada (2.1%; 0.035C), and Japan (2.1%; 0.035C).”²¹⁷ This report further reveals the U.S.'s significant contribution to the issue of global warming. Extensive research confirms that climate change and the extreme weather events experienced domestically and internationally are overwhelmingly caused by human-induced greenhouse gas emissions and not natural environmental cycles. To attribute the wildly irregular wildfires, hurricanes, dry seasons, and every other weather pattern abnormality to anything other than climate change ignores scientific reality and invalidates the lived experiences of people who are impacted. It is significant to note this as it also undermines the process of attribution; ignoring or outright denying that climate change is a result of greenhouse gas emissions

²¹⁶ Le Quéré, Corinne. “Attribution of Observed Global Warming to Countries.”

²¹⁷ Le Quéré

compounded with the lack of action to reduce those emissions allows for complacency.²¹⁸ This report addresses the lack of responsibility taken by the United States when addressing climate change despite the major contribution and the capacity it has to make reforms, which will benefit the domestic and international populations impacted by global warming.

International Climate Agreements

The Kyoto Protocol. The Copenhagen Accord. The Paris Agreement. These landmark international climate agreements were designed to address and combat the effects of climate change on a global scale. With this crisis affecting the entire world, international cooperation is essential to establish unified goals and implement reforms among the highest emitting countries. Establishing a consistent narrative when discussing climate change has also shown to be important in mobilizing the public and some governments to take action²¹⁹. It is imperative to examine the role of the United States in these pivotal international climate change agreements, whether or not they are signees, and assess whether they are adhering to the guidelines and making meaningful progress to reach their goals.

- I. **Kyoto Protocol:** This protocol was an international agreement that set legally binding targets for industrialized countries and economies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in accordance with agreed individual targets. The United States signed the Kyoto Protocol on November 12, 1998; however, Congress has never ratified it, and later the U.S. withdrew its signature altogether.²²⁰ The reasoning behind this decision was under the guise that the agreement would harm the U.S. economy, thus not in the best

²¹⁸ Jang, S. Mo. "Framing Responsibility in Climate Change Discourse: Ethnocentric Attribution Bias, Perceived Causes, and Policy Attitudes."

²¹⁹ Mike Hulme, "Climate Change Narratives: Beyond the Facts of Science."

²²⁰ U.S. Department of State, "United States Signs the Kyoto Protocol."

interests of the country. Overall, there was little participation by the U.S. in developing this protocol.

- II. **Copenhagen Accord:** This accord was a non-binding, political agreement between world leaders to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and limit global warming. The United States signed the accord and participated heavily in negotiations during this 2009 session of the UNFCCC. It did not amount to much; however, it was a significant step towards international cooperation regarding climate change. This accord is significant since the U.S. played an active role in its discussion and drafting of the accord, showing some semblance of interest and commitment to addressing climate change²²¹.
- III. **Paris Agreement:** This agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change adopted in 2015 at the UNCCC (COP21), with an overarching goal to pursue efforts “to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.”²²² It operates on a system where countries submit Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), outlining their plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which are to be updated every five years to reflect increased ambition.²²³ The U.S. joined the Paris Agreement in September 2016, however, President Trump withdrew in 2017. President Biden rejoined the agreement on his first day in office in 2021, and President Trump then withdrew the U.S. once again on his first day back in office in

²²¹ Jake Schmidt, “The Copenhagen Accord - Foundations for International Action on Climate Change.”

²²² UNFCCC. “The Paris Agreement.”

²²³ UNFCCC

2025. President Trump’s decision to remove the U.S. twice from this agreement is citing concerns about fairness, costs, and sovereignty.²²⁴

A clear pattern emerges: the United States has lacked a consistent position on addressing climate change at the international level. Its erratic participation in the Paris Agreement, in particular, undermines global efforts to combat climate change and greatly diminishes U.S. credibility as a reliable partner in international climate initiatives²²⁵. While it can be noted there are significant critiques made for the Paris Agreement, such as the lack of enforcement mechanisms to ensure that the countries signed meet their emission reduction targets, the commitment to reaching any climate goal with any manner of solidifying a government’s intention to address the climate issue in an international forum can make an impact on the global populace.²²⁶

Fighting Climate Change Requires Consistency

With each United States presidential transition, abrupt reversals impact the environmental community. As an actor who plays a massive role in the funding and functionality of many international organizations that address climate change and is one of the top contributors to climate change, the U.S. has a responsibility to maintain a consistent and committed stance on addressing climate change domestically in a concrete way. According to Reuters, the U.S. funds about 21% of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) budget.²²⁷ However, the Trump administration’s decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement

²²⁴ Michael R. Pompeo, “On the U.S. Withdrawal from the Paris Agreement.”

²²⁵ Amanda Leland, “Abandoning the Paris Agreement Harms U.S. Credibility and Competitiveness in the Global Economy.”

²²⁶ Stankovic, Tatjana, Jon Hovi, and Tora Skodvin. “The Paris Agreement’s Inherent Tension between Ambition and Compliance.”

²²⁷ Valerie Volcovici, “Michael Bloomberg Steps in to Help Fund UN Climate Body after Trump Withdrawal - Reuters.”

for a second time in the last decade severely undermines global climate efforts, work that requires long-term progress rather than fluctuations. The role the Environmental Protection Agency plays in facilitating international partnerships in fighting climate change, such as initiatives to advance energy efficiency via the Global Methane Initiative, are essential components relying on the leadership and funding the United States provides. As of 2023, the U.S. has aided in more than 1,250 methane mitigation projects through this program, with a variety of domestic industries voluntarily participating in the green transition.²²⁸ This demonstrates the significant impact the U.S. can have in combating climate change. However, inconsistent leadership decisions and the withdrawal of resources threaten to derail such progress, wearing both domestic and global climate efforts.

The initial setback from President Trump's first removal has already reflected impacts in the U.S., as there were rollbacks of domestic climate policy that left U.S. greenhouse gas emissions at least 3% higher in 2030 than if those policies were left in place.²²⁹ The Biden administration's recommitment to the Paris Agreement and the heavy emphasis on the green transition was refreshing to the environmental community come 2021, however, the transfer of power back to the Republican Party, this year, both in Congress and the Executive Branch, has already posed significant challenges in combating climate change. The Royal Institute for International Relations Security Policy Brief summarized this problem when stating that, "constantly reversing and reintroducing climate change policies whenever a new president comes into office, decreases the U.S.'s international leverage and hurts its reputation as an ambitious climate advocate."²³⁰ Four years, the span of each U.S. presidency, has proven not enough time

²²⁸ Environmental Protection Agency, "What the U.S. Is Doing in the Global Methane Initiative."

²²⁹ Climate Action Tracker, "Effect of the US Withdrawal from the Paris Agreement."

²³⁰ Dejonghe, Marie. "Will Only a Green Power Remain Great Power?"

to make investments in climate initiatives, regardless if that includes government agencies allocating funds to developing green energy or if that is drafting legislation to cap emissions for domestic industries with high pollutant rates.²³¹ Finding a solution to this systemic problem is imperative in this fight against climate change.

Domestic Attitude on Climate Change

Climate change and any conversation around it held in the United States has become deeply politicized. This issue has become polarized, where conversations between regular citizens are unproductive and combative, often with those who deny climate change's existence, dismissing it as "fake news," and attributing the fluctuating climate as natural. Most of these claims of denial are rooted in ignorance due to the lack of comprehensive education on climate change, to which misinformation online only further purports these narratives.²³² A study conducted on the Social Anatomy of Climate Change Denial in the United States found that the strongest negative correlations at the state and county levels were the levels of education and the amount of COVID-19 vaccination rates. This study concluded a profile of a climate change denier to be a "Republican, with no college degree and without a COVID-19 vaccination living in a region with a high average annual temperature."²³³ With this profile highlighting the lack of education beyond a high school degree, it can be concluded that those who fall in this demographic are without the skills and tools needed to dissect disinformation online, which leads to more doubt and denial. Politicians and social media influencers are aware of this and capitalize on this flaw in American citizens, to which they can control the narrative surrounding

²³¹ Dejonghe

²³² Gounaridis, Dimitrios, and Joshua P. Newell. "The Social Anatomy of Climate Change Denial in the United States."

²³³ Gounaridis, Dimitrios, and Joshua P. Newell

climate change to further their agendas. Denialism and mistrust in science are more prevalent in states and communities where local economies are more reliant on fossil fuels.²³⁴ With the dis and misinformation epidemic that has spread across the country, finding ways to mitigate the effects for American voters and government officials alike is essential. A proposed solution to this problem could be to establish a consistent narrative for the government, federal and state alike, to maintain and advocate for. Additionally, proposing an education standard or a federally agreed-upon definition for climate and environmental studies that cannot be impeded by state governments would also be an ideal but potentially overzealous goal.

On the other hand, there is another group of climate deniers who cannot feign ignorance the same way; politicians and industry leaders are rooted in the world of information and are active in conversations around climate initiatives with clear reports of global warming's existence. It would not serve their careers to put blinders on to say that climate change does not exist, because they truly do not believe it does, but rather they are using this momentum to maintain their foothold in the lucrative industries that are key contributors to global warming. The Center for American Progress analyzed statements made by sitting members of the 118th Congress to determine whether they deny the existence of human-caused climate change. They found 123 elected officials (23% of the total Congressional body), 100 representatives and 23 senators, are climate deniers. The study also found that members of Congress also receive publicly disclosed contributions, allowing for the potential influence of the fossil fuel industry.²³⁵ When a politician takes to social media to spread misinformation on an extreme weather event,

²³⁴ Gounaridis, Dimitrios, and Joshua P. Newell

²³⁵ Center for American Progress. "Climate Deniers of the 118th Congress."

attributing it to something other than climate change, it is purposeful framing.²³⁶ It is preferential for them to steer the public away from green transition initiatives when they are backed by those invested in the oil and gas industry, especially when it comes to supporting legislation that may impact their profits. This report found that climate deniers in the 118th Congress received \$52,071,133 in lifetime campaign contributions from the fossil fuel industry.²³⁷ There were shifts in rhetoric from outright denial of climate change's existence to the reattribution of responsibility for addressing the climate crisis to other countries, framing climate activism as 'alarmism', and general spreading of misinformation.²³⁸ Following the money, at least in this case, is incredibly telling in the motives of politicians and their varying degrees of climate change denial and the stark ramifications of such opinions.

A study conducted by the University of Michigan showed that the concept of in-group/out-group influence on believing in climate change has a significant correlation, to which this idea of politicians weighing in on this issue with their voter populace must maintain a consistent narrative.²³⁹ In other words, since their "in-group" - their voting base - has been made to understand climate change to be a natural phenomenon and not of human action, they too assume this understanding and translate that into their voting habits for congressional legislation. The study also concluded that should representatives want to garner more support for climate change policy, they must avoid attributing responsibility for contributing to climate change to an in-group, like those invested in the fossil fuel industry. Politicians, those who are the supposed liaison between the American people and policy, are using this understanding to sustain their

²³⁶ Jang, S. Mo. "Framing Responsibility in Climate Change Discourse: Ethnocentric Attribution Bias, Perceived Causes, and Policy Attitudes."

²³⁷ Center for American Progress

²³⁸ Center for American Progress

²³⁹ Center for American Progress

positions of power while simultaneously impacting any chance of climate legislation that does not serve their personal and political agendas.

Climate Legislation in the United States

Passing climate legislation requires partisan support which has proven difficult to accomplish. There have been very few climate bills passed by the U.S. Congress in the past 20 years, however, there have been a significant number of legislative actions in the form of votes on bills, resolutions, and amendments. A report conducted on issue linkage and climate votes in the U.S. House of Representatives from 2007-2020 has shown that though climate issues may not get legislative traction on their own, there seems to be a correlation between their linkage to other important environmental action that changes the way legislators vote on these issues.²⁴⁰ The report found that linking other environmental or non-environmental issues that can be framed as separate from climate change, given its polarizing nature, can allow for House representatives to claim they were voting for the non-climate issue that their constituents support.²⁴¹ It is for this reason that arguably the most important recent climate law enacted in the United States, the Inflation Reduction Act, does not have a climate label, or rather the title of the act does not mention climate change whatsoever. This is an example of how there is a consciousness of politicians in addressing climate change, both in its denial and support, and how framing is central to the tactics employed in passing legislation. Issue linkage does not always return positively for House members or politicians more generally, thanks to the potentially polarizing nature of the topic or backlash from interest groups.²⁴² It can be argued that

²⁴⁰ Kayla Morton, Nives Dolsak, and Aseem Prakash, “Issue Linkage and Climate Votes in the U.S. House of Representatives, 2007–2020.”

²⁴¹ Kayla Morton, Nives Dolsak, and Aseem Prakash

²⁴² Kayla Morton, Nives Dolsak, and Aseem Prakash

this is a flawed method of governance, leading to inefficiency and the mis-prioritization of political goals for the sake of playing the long game.

With this obvious federal dysfunction and blockage surrounding climate legislation, state legislatures have proven to be more successful in passing laws, and policies to regulate emissions, and establish goals for their statewide economies. California and Texas, while very different in terms of political affiliation, are both leaders in some aspects of the green transition. California and its progressive governor Gavin Newsome have proven to be formidable in the climate change fighting arena, with it being the first in the world to release a plan to achieve net zero carbon pollution by 2045.²⁴³ Governor Newsome has maintained a consistent stance on ensuring that any federal law or policy change throughout the recent transitions of governments would not impede his state's initiatives to tackle climate change. Because of its wide range of topography and environmental conditions, California is seen as a leader in exemplifying the adaptation of climate change policy and initiatives for the rest of the country and the world at large.²⁴⁴ The California state government has enacted proactive climate change mitigation and adaptation legislation policies, which have sustained state and federal leadership changes and proven to be successful in addressing global warming.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott, while he has not been as vocal as his California counterpart, has led his state to become the nation's leader in green energy production via its massive investment in solar and wind power.²⁴⁵ There have been significant economic benefits to the Texan economy since these programs and incentives have been initiated.²⁴⁶ Despite also

²⁴³ State of California, "California Releases World's First Plan to Achieve Net Zero Carbon Pollution."

²⁴⁴ Franklin, Janet, and Glen M. MacDonald. "Climate Change and California Sustainability—Challenges and Solutions."

²⁴⁵ Chen Lyu, Sam Fleckenstein, and Zach Nerod, "Texas Energy Policy Landscape and Analysis Report - Closures."

²⁴⁶ Chang, Byungik, and Ken Starcher. "Evaluation of Wind and Solar Energy Investments in Texas."

holding the title of the biggest oil and gas producer in the country, Texas has been the leader in the United States in investing in and producing renewable energy. Being able to set aside the political nature of climate change, the governor, and the state legislature were able to see both the economic and environmental benefits of allocating time and money to this sector.²⁴⁷ These are just two examples of domestic efforts to tackle climate change and the green energy transition despite the federal government's lack of interest and commitment to maintaining a steady position on how the United States should be addressing climate change.

International Impact of U.S. Domestic Response to Climate Change

Being one of the top polluters, with one of the biggest economies, and arguably the most influential actor in the modern world, the United States has a responsibility to utilize the resources it has to fight climate change. Most importantly, with its habit of demanding other countries adhere to a green development standard, one that the United States was not required to follow given pre-industrial revolution knowledge of pollutants was essentially non-existent.²⁴⁸ It has been well-researched that developing countries have borne the brunt of the impacts of climate change despite contributing such a small percentage, if at all.²⁴⁹ The concept of common but differentiated responsibilities in response to climate change is central to understanding how to attribute responsibility. It is the argument of still developing countries that they have a right to equal access to resources to develop, contending their outrage against the hypocrisy of the Western countries who demand that they reduce their emissions despite countries like the United States have even followed through on their reduction commitments.²⁵⁰ Developing countries

²⁴⁷ Chang, Byungik, and Ken Starcher

²⁴⁸ Mattoo, Aaditya, and Arvind Subramanian. "A 'Greenprint' for International Cooperation on Climate Change."

²⁴⁹ Mattoo, Aaditya, and Arvind Subramanian

²⁵⁰ Mattoo, Aaditya, and Arvind Subramanian

argue that, despite the global north's rhetoric about a green transition, there has been a significant lack of financial support and resources to help these countries achieve their environmental goals. If the intention truly was to achieve a greener world, with less reliance on fossil fuels, there would be more concrete actions and tangible examples of this internationally. The international community looks to the U.S. for leadership, but the inconsistency of U.S. policies on climate change and fossil fuel dependency undermines its credibility. The political polarization regarding climate change and the reduction of dependence on fossil fuels running rampant across the United States makes it difficult for other nations to trust the U.S. as a reliable partner in global climate initiatives. Given the ripple effects that domestic U.S. policies have on international cooperation, the lack of a stable, long-term approach to climate action is a major obstacle to maintaining international cooperation.

Further, with it clear that the United States has little interest in prioritizing the green transition or sufficiently addressing climate change, reframing the potential outcomes of this attitude may alter this. Recently, there has been an international push to invest in developing the means to produce clean energy, namely solar panels and wind turbines, among others. U.S. competitors like China have made significant progress in leading this investment and production race, one that will most likely shape the foreseeable future.²⁵¹ Oil and gas are finite resources; it is only a matter of time before the Earth runs dry of this lucrative source. Thus, it only makes sense to shift the narrative away from condemning a strong response to the green energy transition in favor of continuing to be a competitor with China in this development. International commentators and scholars have put out opinions that pose the possibility of a 'new Cold War',

²⁵¹ Schindler, Seth, Ilias Alami, Jessica DiCarlo, Nicholas Jepson, Steve Rolf, Mustafa Kemal Bayırbağ, Louis Cyuzuzo, et al. "The Second Cold War: US-China Competition for Centrality in Infrastructure, Digital, Production, and Finance Networks."

one that while is not a perfect analogy for the realities of this rivalry due to the difference in global order strength and the significant economic interdependence between China and the United States, however, it is worth noting that there is the substantial foundation for the U.S. government to meet this challenge with full force.²⁵²

Framing is an essential aspect in successfully addressing this issue, an issue that combines addressing the American response to climate change and giving weight to reaching a consensus in the U.S. government on China's potential to lead the charge in the renewable energy industry, more so than it already has. Ignoring the possibility of China's move to hegemonic status in this industry is short-sighted, which furthers the argument that the United States must reform its stance on the importance of climate change policy and legislation, both from a domestic and international lens. Should this be ignored due to a continued lack of commitment or a blatant disregard for the severity of the situation, there could be a future where China and Europe are the biggest trading partners in renewable energy materials, the United States completely out of the picture. If it is still the position of the U.S. to remain a global leader, acknowledging the reality of climate change and global warming, the abundance of resources the country has to contribute to this cause, and the clear competitiveness China poses, must be taken into consideration. The core difference between China and the United States in this regard is that of its economic basis: capitalism. While it is up for debate how truly capitalist China is, it is safe to say that Americans know how to do capitalism. It is for this reason that it makes aggressively addressing climate change in the United States all that much more difficult, as capitalism inherently disincentivizes industries from investing in green energy, as it detracts from their

²⁵² Schindler, Seth, Ilias Alami, Jessica DiCarlo, Nicholas Jepson, Steve Rolf, Mustafa Kemal Bayırbağ, Louis Cyuzuzo, et al.

already lucrative investments in the fossil fuel industry.²⁵³ This issue has become more than just trying to reduce the effects of global warming so there is a future at all, it has highlighted the narrow-minded views of American governance, views that are impeded by prioritizing short-term goals that could result in minimal benefit to the people of this country come the next administration change.

There has been a shift in the international world order, one that has had the United States at the helm since the Second World War. The U.S. has been fighting tooth and nail to maintain its position of power and influence, however, it can be argued that because of its purposeful ignoring of the climate crisis and the ramifications of this decision, it has sped up its decline in the eyes of the global community. Thanks to the false promises of emission reductions, removal of signatures and funding for international agreements, domestic disinterest, and an uneducated voter base, the U.S. has significant reforms to prioritize if it sustains its desire to lead the modern world. Much of the international community has acknowledged the severity of climate change and how it takes accountability and proper attribution to address means to tackle the crisis realistically. Having one of the biggest emitters ignoring its responsibility to reform makes it very difficult for the rest of the world to take climate change seriously, especially since the U.S. has the means to make these reforms easily achievable. Being a world leader requires holding itself accountable, something the United States must prioritize in these unprecedented times.

Conclusion

Depolarizing climate change and the environment as a whole should be the main goal for the United States in this section. The U.S. has maintained its position in remaining a leader in the international community. This comes with reforming its addressing of climate change, both with

²⁵³ Hsu, Shi-Ling. *Capitalism and the Environment: A Proposal to Save the Planet*.

legislation and its overall global stance on its responsibility to play a role in this endeavor. With this change in narrative, the U.S. government should also consider its investment in producing renewable energy materials to compete with China so it will not fall behind in this ever-growing race to lead the green transition internationally. Moreover, addressing the blatant climate denial from politicians and ordinary citizens must be prioritized. It speaks to the true intentions of those in positions of power to perpetuate the dis and misinformation campaigns around climate change and the environment in schools and in public forums. Identifying those in government positions who are funded by the fossil fuel industry and ensuring their rhetoric around addressing the climate crisis is one without influence must also be prioritized. The U.S. must take climate change seriously and focus time and energy on establishing a credible domestic response and attitude so it can use its resources to aid the international community in this essential fight.

U.S. Climate Change Policy Options

- I. Reframe climate policy & link to other partisan issues**
- II. Create Federal standards for climate change narrative and education**
- III. Fund more R&D to meet international standards**
- IV. Increased transparency & accountability of US political leaders**
- V. Commit to unified goals to mobilize public & private support**

Environment Policy Recommendation

- I. Initiate efforts to depoliticize legislation proposals pertaining to climate change and the protection of the environment more broadly by engaging in bipartisan efforts to hold rational and factual policy proposals.**
- II. Pursue climate-energy policies that use economic framing focused on increasing the traditional energy sector's capacity for the clean energy transition without conceding to their interests in developing new projects and reducing federal oversight**
- III. Create a long-term plan on how to mitigate and adapt agricultural practices, comparable to the CAP plans created by the EU. In this program, each state would create its own plans and submit them to a federal review board which will determine whether the plan aligns with federal priorities.**
- IV. Encourage U.S. allies to collaborate with China specifically in support of the green transformation to accelerate Europe's energy transition and steer China away from its dependence on coal.**
- V. Continue to lean on Chinese rare earth mineral (REE) imports to build momentum in the energy transition while prioritizing investments in the U.S.'s REE supply chain capacity. Employ push and pull incentives to simultaneously stimulate REE supply and demand and grow a domestic market to gradually wean off import dependence.**
- VI. Federal standard of scientifically backed definition of climate change and the U.S.'s role in contributing to global greenhouse gas emissions, followed by an academic standard solidifying the message as to climate change's existence.**

Conclusion

The very presence of the environment section in this 21st-century grand strategy report speaks to its importance for the United States' national security and international influence. This section recognizes the urgent need for climate action to maintain the probability of staying within the limits of the Paris Agreement's temperature levels. As a major emitter, the United States is responsible for keeping its domestic sectors accountable to the internationally determined emission reduction standards. As a great power, it also has a responsibility to promote global climate action and advocate for the concept of common but differentiated responsibilities amongst its allies and competitors. By working to depoliticize climate change and reform information networks, the U.S. can educate its population and close the gap created by extreme party polarization. Further, reframing climate legislation in economic terms linked to administration priorities and states' goals can increase bipartisan cooperation and implement durable policies that adequately address the climate crisis.

Domestically, the U.S. must address its agriculture and power sectors' excessive capacity for contributions to CO₂ emissions. The agricultural industry exacerbates climate change in its efforts to meet the ever-increasing consumption patterns of the American population. However, depoliticizing climate change to foster bipartisan agreement can help address the risks individuals face working in agricultural production and consuming its products. Increasing bipartisan support for government oversight of GMOs, the reduction of pesticide and fertilizer use, and prioritizing healthy cattle feed are crucial to reforming agricultural production. Furthermore, pursuing protection policies for land and endangered species, and greener agriculture practices can preserve biodiversity and further the U.S.'s, and eventually influence the international, sustainable agricultural transformation.

The analysis of China and the U.S.'s progress in the renewable energy transition highlights the importance of addressing climate change through the power sector. Because the U.S. faces challenges from its political polarization and pattern of aggressive policy rollbacks, it must learn to lean on international cooperation with Europe and China to continue building momentum in the energy transition while it addresses its inadequacies. By reframing climate change in terms of the current administration's priorities, the U.S. government can work to depoliticize climate change, increase bipartisan support for the decarbonization of the energy sector, and grow its clean energy market competitiveness. Additionally, encouraging the U.S. and its partners to collaborate with China provides continued access to its key REE market while developing domestic capacity for supply and demand. It also creates an avenue to stabilize tensions and pressure China away from its dependence on coal. Climate change cannot be addressed in isolation, and neither can the green energy transition.

International cooperation, in all sectors of the American government, is a key component to addressing climate change litigation and agreements. Domestic reform is necessary to tackle the climate crisis concretely before engaging in the international conversation about foreign energy consumption standards and the U.S.'s subsequent goal of sustaining its role as a global leader. The international community demands that the United States take accountability for addressing climate change domestically because the lack of consistent policy and mitigation efforts by legislators impedes the international community's efforts to combat climate change. With the polarizing nature of this issue, the United States is unable to see the bigger picture of its disengagement with taking actions to combat global warming, the ramifications of which can be felt in the global institutions that aim to mitigate the effect which relies on the funding and resources from the U.S. Additionally, with the U.S. wanting to sustain their position as a world

leader, it cannot continue to move back and forth between combating climate change and pulling out of international agreements committing to reducing emissions to which reduces its credibility on the global stage. From here, the United States has much to reform and address to ensure there is a future for the international community the U.S. can be a leader of.

Politics

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Introduction

The United States has a responsibility to acknowledge their role as a hegemonic power in the world order. To improve democracy domestically, the U.S. must address the political health of American institutions. The two-party political system which has shown high levels of populism over the past few decades which undermines democracy. In turn, human rights serve to protect citizens' dignity and personal freedoms, and with the improvement of domestic political systems are upheld. American efforts towards improving collective efforts towards these issues will serve to spread democracy internationally.

The definition of democracy exists outside of the ability of individuals to elect their representatives. For Americans, democracy is rooted in the Declaration of Independence, where it is stated that everyone has the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Though the right to vote is a privilege and power of United States' citizens, modern day democracy goes beyond this definition. Democracy means governance by the people, for the people. In the case of the United States, barriers to voting and systemic inequalities at times prevent certain demographics from voting and being able to access institutional knowledge. Due to this, the ability to vote alone is not sufficient when defining the term 'democracy'. Instead, democracy encompasses how individuals find a sense of belonging and protection in American society through politics, education, identity, and community.

The United States holds a strong hegemonic power over many different parts of the world. To maintain this position, the United States should prioritize addressing its domestic challenges before international ones. In the case of politics, the United States should always prioritize their own democracy and its well-being before attempting to help other nations. Additionally, if the United States prioritizes its democracy, they can serve as a model for other

nations and enhance the country's ability to support democratic development globally.

Acknowledging where the United States has weaknesses could influence other nations to do the same.

To uphold democracy in the United States, institutions are responsible for representing and acting on behalf of public interest. These domestic institutions are defined as the legislative, executive, and judicial branches which provide checks and balances for one another to fulfill the duties of democracy. Although checks and balances have been established to prevent the concentration of power in a specific sector, there still remains room for improvement. Issues including polarization interfere with the purpose and work of such institutions. Only through further examining how polarization degrades the integrity of functions within each branch can solutions be implemented.

When considering democracy domestically, some members of American institutions look to amass power and control public opinion. In a 2019 interview with PBS, Steve Bannon, former White House chief strategist during the first Trump administration, discussed the term ‘muzzle velocity’.²⁵⁴ The strategy is currently employed by the executive branch especially amidst President Trump’s issuing of executive orders during the first week of his second term. To “muzzle velocity,” Bannon describes the strategy of overwhelming the media so as to avoid coherent opposition.²⁵⁵ The employment of such a strategy, identified as such by Bannon, implies the undermining of democracy from within an institution responsible for protecting democracy. Addressing this internal deterioration requires the strengthening of internal checks and balances and public trust.

²⁵⁴ Klein, Ezra. “Opinion | Don’t Believe Him.” *The New York Times*.

²⁵⁵ Klein.

Moving onto the political parties within the United States, both the Democratic and Republican Parties have shown increasing displays of populism in the most recent decades. Although populism is not fundamentally a negative concept, populism in the 21st century has fueled political parties to become extreme versions of themselves which ultimately is not stable for the United States' political sphere. In other words, the Democratic Party is becoming more liberal and extreme, and the Republican Party is becoming more radical and conservative. In addition to the two parties becoming more extreme versions of themselves, the two parties have also been seen to prioritize their foes rather than other goals.²⁵⁶ Populism is not fundamentally a negative concept, however, in recent decades and especially in recent elections, populism has provoked a negative political environment in the United States.

The new negative political environment in the United States influenced by populism must be addressed for the sake of the nation's democracy. The rise of populism that has immensely changed the political parties in the country has allowed for major alterations that no longer represent American democracy. For example, the two parties growing farther apart on the political scale leads to an increase in political aggression which goes against many American values.²⁵⁷ Additionally, the parties pulling farther apart no longer leaves leeway for politicians or an administration to merge towards the center to please more citizens rather than just one singular party.²⁵⁸ These two issues that arose from populism have weakened the United States' democracy and must be addressed.

²⁵⁶ Lowndes, Joseph. "Populism in the United States."

²⁵⁷ Kalmoe, Nathan, and Lilliana Mason. *Radical American Partisanship : Mapping Violent Hostility, Its Causes, and the Consequences for Democracy*.

²⁵⁸ Figueira, Filipa. "Why the Current Peak in Populism in the US and Europe? Populism as a Deviation in the Median Voter Theorem."

Human rights as defined by the United Nations are the rights of all human beings regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion or any other status. The United Nations has created a comprehensive body of human rights law using the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This led to the development of the Human Rights Council which conducts the Universal Periodic Review of all 193 UN member states to reflect on the state of human rights in all participating member states²⁵⁹. However, even with councils and investigative bodies, human rights enforcement continues to be a battle due to underreporting and lack of authority to take legal action to enforce them²⁶⁰.

Valuing freedoms, respecting human rights, and holding genuine and fair elections are the core values of democracy. Healthy democracy provides protections to unalienable rights meaning democracy and human rights have an interdependent and mutually reinforcing relationship²⁶¹. Weak democracy is a reflection of threatened human rights and impedes on the individual's ability to grow, create, and contribute to society. Innovation and stability can only be encouraged and upheld under an accountable democratic government. Democratic principles inherently involve human rights protections and cannot be separated as one cannot act without the other.

The state of politics in the nation shapes the policies and systems that govern the lives of domestic residents. Maintaining democracy and upholding democratic values exist at the core of the nation's values and influences the daily American freedoms. By addressing these potential threats to American democracy, the nation works towards a political system which asserts the

²⁵⁹ United Nations. "Human Rights | United Nations."

²⁶⁰ Wasiq, Mohammad Rasikh. International Enforcement of Human Rights: Potency and Strategies.

²⁶¹ United Nations. "Democracy | United Nations."

foundations of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness on which the nation was founded. Politics defines the way society lives and the way in which the nation interacts with it.

American Institutions & Polarization

Many know democracy is associated with the practice of voting as individuals are granted the power to elect their representatives. However, the definition of a healthy democracy extends past the notion of voting to encompass community participation. Although the power is with the people in democratic powers, individuals should be granted the pursuit of life outside of preoccupation with their governing bodies. Democracy is essential as it fosters the rights of individuals across socioeconomic and cultural differences and has been proven to cause economic growth.²⁶² Beyond such factors, democracy also promotes global stability, human rights, and international cooperation.

Polarization has become somewhat synonymous when understanding democracy in the United States and assessing the effectiveness of its institutions. The role of institutions is to encourage consensus through collaboration and, at times, conflict.²⁶³ Conflict is a necessary means in order to advocate and attempt satisfying all sides of an issue, but too much can also be proven to be harmful. In the following assessment of American democratic institutions, the impacts of polarization become a common trend. Identifying these impacts and their causes lead to policy solutions to combat the negative effects of polarization. Such solutions need to occur at the national, state, and local levels in order to connect individuals and opposite sides of the aisle.

To further examine the United States' role in foreign affairs, it is important to understand how its institutions uphold democracy as they set a model for governance worldwide. All three branches of government – legislative, executive, and judicial – are responsible for functioning

²⁶² Acemoglu, Daron, Suresh Naidu, Pascual Restrepo, and James A. Robinson. "Democracy Does Cause Growth."

²⁶³ Lu, Xiaoyan, Jianxi Gao, and Boleslaw K. Szymanski. "The Evolution of Polarization in the Legislative Branch of Government."

domestically as to strengthen democratic institutions outside of the United States. The means of this section will assess the effectiveness and propose policy recommendations that further endeavor to aid institutions as they serve individuals.

Legislative Branch

The legislative branch of government is tasked with the powers as granted to them by the Constitution. Much of this power regards oversight over the executive branch, including the power of impeachment, confirmation of presidential nominations, and the authority to declare war. The following subsection illustrates how such congressional powers are wielded and to what extent issues like polarization impede on their effectiveness.

Although not mentioned in the Constitution, the underlying power of oversight by the legislative branch facilitates the separation of powers between it and the executive and judicial branches alike.²⁶⁴ Oversight is critical to a representative democracy as it organizes public discourse on government objectives and performance. Beyond the powers granted to the legislative branch by the Constitution, formal oversight is performed by committees from the House of Representatives and Senate with professional staff members acting as expertise, thus providing a check on the executive branch. Indirect examples of oversight include individual lawmakers' interactions with the press, educating the public and having discussions about complex issues, and offering advice about policy implementation to department heads.²⁶⁵ When considering the functionality of oversight, it is valuable to understand what impedes this work, including polarization.

²⁶⁴ Fowler, Linda L. 2015. "Watchdogs on the Hill: The Decline of Congressional Oversight of U.S. Foreign Relations"

²⁶⁵ Fowler.

Not only does polarization undermine Congress as an institution, but it additionally undermines the people as a concentration of conflict disregards consensus and prevents impactful action from taking place. To understand the evolution of polarization within the legislative branch, a 2019 study looked to quantify patterns in roll-call votes cast in the U.S. Congress over the course of the last six decades. The study found that polarization levels in Congress following the 1990s have only grown.²⁶⁶ Previous to this pattern, polarization was found to be evident but would decrease as Congressional terms would unfold with legislators gradually agreeing more with members of the opposite party. The last 14 Congressional offices have seen a reverse in this pattern with polarization increasing later during terms, the cause of these changes coming from multiple influences. One cause being the possible influence of electorates on these politicians. However, this study indicates the importance of understanding the differences between polarization in the Republican and Democratic parties. While some argue that heightened polarization led to the election of President Trump, data suggests that these trends predate his presidency, indicating deeper structural causes. This indicates deeper causes of polarization and further assessment of how polarization impacts the function of each party individually.

Why is polarization in the legislative branch a bad thing if conflict is part of its responsibility? As previously mentioned, consensus is a necessary part of institutions in order to put forth policy. With too much conflict, in the case of rising levels of polarization, the legislature faces cases of gridlock thus preventing work from taking place. To some degree gridlock is a byproduct of the separation of powers and does not prevent congressional action as seen under President Lyndon Johnson's enactment of landmark health care, environment, civil

²⁶⁶ Lu et al.

rights, transportation, and education statutes.²⁶⁷ In other cases like in 1992, gridlock has paved the way to deadlock which only serves to punish the American people. The 1992 gridlock prevented efforts to cut the capital gains tax and to reform lobbying among other issues.²⁶⁸ The varying levels of congressional effectiveness are tied directly to polarization with gridlock increasing amidst divided government, policy distance between the House and Senate, and filibuster threat.²⁶⁹ In 2025 the polarization between the two-party system has been further perpetuated and has been observed with rising levels of radicalization. The impeachments of President Trump without conviction are indicative of the gridlock happening within both the execution of the legislative and executive branches' work.

Polarization is harmful to the effectiveness of the institutions under the legislative branch as discussed. When contextualizing this harm in affecting foreign affairs, domestic institutions are necessary to promote transparency that allows constituents to evaluate the performance of the president. Although the general public tends to have limited interest and knowledge about foreign affairs, they have been observed to be sensitive to the costs of war and diplomacy.²⁷⁰ With this in mind, it becomes imperative that the dysfunction within the legislative branch be addressed to better connect individuals with their elected officials.

One method by which to promote transparency could occur in relation to lobbying efforts. As mentioned in the 1992 gridlock, lobbying reform has been something that the legislative branch works towards. The United States efforts can be seen in the Foreign Agent Registration Act of 1938, although more work remains to be done. Joint efforts towards

²⁶⁷ Binder, Sarah. 2000. "Going Nowhere: A Gridlocked Congress." *Brookings*.

²⁶⁸ Binder.

²⁶⁹ Binder.

²⁷⁰ Fowler.

transparency and integrity in lobbying and influence is witnessed in the work of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The OECD expressed revisions to the 2021 OECD Report to Council recommending the “disclosure of lobbying and influence activities conducted on behalf of foreign state interests, as well as donations and contributions received.”²⁷¹ Other amendments to the original report cover the implementation of transparency measures such as a public footprint of decision-making processes, and integrity-related measures like procedural rules, standards of conduct, and rules on conflicts-of-interest.²⁷² The recommendations account for the lack of regulatory lobbying policies on the international stage. It calls for these changes from member states along with companies and non-profit organizations.

Awareness and promotion of relevance among adherents including the United States have been the results so far of the 2021 recommendations. Austria, Chile, the European Union, France, and Ireland have already implemented such policies surrounding lobbying in accordance with the suggestions from the report. If the United States were to follow suit in improving the Foreign Agent Registration Act (FARA), public trust could be improved, and the people could be better connected to the political system that supposedly represents them. Although the United States already practices some of the intentions of the OECD’s recommendations, many have complained that FARA violates the First Amendment.²⁷³ Because it was enacted in 1938, the broad and dated language of FARA requires reform for effective present-day use. To do so, the United States could refer to the existing policies in countries that have more recently implemented recommendations in accordance with the OECD. Such action would work towards

²⁷¹ OECD. “Lobbyists, Governments and Public Trust, Volume 3: Implementing the OECD Principles for Transparency and Integrity in Lobbying.”

²⁷² OECD.

²⁷³ Hilferty, Katelyn M., David Plotinsky, Amanda B. Robinson, Moshe Klein, and Carl A. Valenstein. “DOJ’s Latest Attempt at Modernizing FARA Signals Greater Focus on Compliance and Enforcement.”

increasing public confidence in the ability of the United States through efficient and effective transparency.

Executive Branch

Polarization not only affects function within the legislative branch, but also the executive branch. It has become apparent that polarization has lent itself to the radicalization of the American people. One study found political polarization increased levels of misinformation and disinformation within the United States.²⁷⁴ The study describes how polarization leads to selective exposure to information, thus circulating the information to be shared among like-minded individuals. Misinformation and disinformation are shared in the same cycle, further increasing polarization.²⁷⁵ The election of President Biden, followed by the January 6th insurrection at the Capitol by President Trump's supporters is a manifestation of such misinformation. With Trump blatantly denying the outcome of the 2020 presidential election results and encouraging his followers to storm the Capitol building, radicalization manifests beyond voting.

In recent news and events, the power of the President selecting their cabinet members has become increasingly scrutinized. In President Trump's second term he announced his cabinet nominations, some of which like Senator Marco Rubio, confirmed by 99 votes from the Senate, are well-approved candidates. However, some of Trump's other nominees have been scrutinized for their lack of expertise or experience in their assigned field. With the power granted to Cabinet members to advise the president, the scrutiny his nominees face is understandable.

²⁷⁴ Marino, Giada, and Laura Iannelli. "Seven Years of Studying the Associations between Political Polarization and Problematic Information: A Literature Review."

²⁷⁵ Marino and Iannell.

When seeking to understand the design of the President’s Cabinet, the Framers sought to distribute the separation of power. They carried on the British view that liberty should be preserved through the separation of branches, but also the overlap of legislative, executive, and judicial powers.²⁷⁶ As discussed with polarization, the impacts of such a framework implies the greater effects of Cabinet members outside of their role in the executive branch. An administration potentially suffers if a cabinet uses their informational advantages and authority to advance policy goals not in collective alignment, but the effects are ultimately felt by citizens.²⁷⁷ A study on Latin American, African, and Asian coalitions in presidential democracies observed the accountability aspect of the interaction between political parties and coalition (Cabinet) arrangement.²⁷⁸ The data set encompasses 25 different cabinets across seven countries, resulting in the following observations: a political party is less likely to check a minister’s actions if they have unaligned ideology, the use of junior ministers to check ministers, and that these results are contingent on a government’s democratic experience.²⁷⁹ When considering the implications of the study’s findings for the United States, there are more negative outcomes related to the political structure. As the American institution holds balance between the three branches, a counterbalance also exists between the two-party system. Although other parties exist, political power remains concentrated between Democratic and Republican ideals. The study suggests that under the Trump administration, Democratic lawmakers are less likely to hold cabinet members accountable, limiting the necessary checks and balances on executive power. This lack of counterbalance enables the advancement of more radical right ideologies of the Trump

²⁷⁶ Sofaer, Abraham. “Presidential Power and National Security.”

²⁷⁷ Thijm, Joris, and Jorge M. Fernandes. “Parties and Coalition Governance in Presidential Democracies.”

²⁷⁸ Thijm and Fernandez.

²⁷⁹ Thijm and Fernandez.

Administration. The lack of other stronger parties will additionally contribute to the polarization between the two parties as the decisions made by the Cabinet continue to be unagreeable to the left. As found in the study, the use of similar positions to junior ministers, like seen in the United Kingdom, could disseminate the concentration of power in individuals.

Dissatisfaction with presidential administrations and their appointed cabinet members has highlighted concerns about the internal balance of power in the executive branch. In addition to the role of the President, the counterparts of America's institutions outside of the executive branch are affected by policy and should be incentivized to hold entities like Cabinet members accountable for their actions. However, the aforementioned study indicates this might not be the case. Executive orders cannot override federal law or utilize power delegated to another branch through the Constitution. When considering the executive orders President Trump issued in his first hundred days of his second term, it is further made clear the need for checks and balances are needed. Many of these executive orders have faced legal challenges, particularly those affecting D.E.I. efforts, birthright citizenship, and transgender individuals.²⁸⁰ It remains to be seen if the checks and balances provided by the other branches will properly address the harmful implications of his orders.

Beyond the Trump Administration and leading into the twenty-first century, it still remains relevant to address the rising implications of polarization within the executive branch. Although future administrations may reverse decisions of the current or past administrations, Trump's actions have cause to worry the public about the future. Checks and balances exist between the branches of government, but also between the different levels of government including at the state level. To address the negative effects of President Trump's executive

²⁸⁰ Anders, Christopher. "What Is an Executive Order and How Does It Work? | ACLU."

orders, twenty-two states have taken action in a lawsuit to prevent his executive order that attacks birthright citizenship.²⁸¹ Following the current administration, the role of states in protecting the interests of its citizens is important to acknowledge as states continue to utilize their jurisdiction.

Judicial Branch

Formally, the judicial branch assesses laws and protects the rights of people. One might assume the lack of conviction following the two impeachments of President Trump were a failure of the judicial branch. However, the power of impeachment lies with the legislative branch and Trump was ultimately acquitted by a 57-43 Senate vote, despite the majority of senators voting to hold jurisdiction over a former President for acts that occurred during their term.²⁸² Though him being acquitted lies with the legislative branch, the judicial branch is partially responsible for his lack of conviction. The Supreme Court ruled in a 6-3 vote in favor of former presidents having broad immunity from prosecution, ending the notion that Trump could be tried in court before the November 2024 presidential election.²⁸³ Of the nine justices on the Supreme Court at the time of this report, six are more conservative leaning with three being nominated by Trump during his first presidential term. It is undeniable that this political leaning affected the outcome of the vote despite the nonpartisan manner in which it is supposed to conduct itself.

²⁸¹ Catalini, Mike. “22 States Sue to Stop Trump’s Order Blocking Birthright Citizenship | AP News.”

²⁸² “President Donald Trump and Impeachable Offenses | Constitution Annotated | Congress.Gov | Library of Congress.”

²⁸³ Sherman, Mark. “Supreme Court Rules Ex-Presidents Have Broad Immunity, Dimming Chance of a Pre-Election Trump Trial.”

There remains a disconnect between the Supreme Court and public interest. The ruling on *Trump vs. the United States* is not an isolated incident.²⁸⁴ From a Pew Research Center survey conducted in 2024, about 51% of voters had an unfavorable opinion of the Supreme Court.²⁸⁵ The statistic is a historically low percentage, indicating the growing distrust of the public with an institution set up to protect their rights. About 73% of Republicans have a favorable view of the Court, while only 24% of Democrats share the opinion.²⁸⁶ Rather than being impartial, the impact of the Court is decidedly partisan as it stands currently. Polarization is not exclusive to the legislative branch and affects the decisions of all three branches of government. In 2022, the Court ruled to overturn *Roe vs. Wade*, no longer protecting the constitutional right to receive an abortion.²⁸⁷ Following the decision, some states were quick to ban abortion while other states were quick to put safeguards in place, protecting bodily autonomy. States are protected under the Tenth Amendment to receive any power not given to the federal government. When considering the President's executive orders, it is especially important to consider as states do not need to immediately adhere to them. As polarization affects the federal level, the protections at the state level for individual rights are a necessity.

The discontent with the Supreme Court brings to light other issues including the causes. There has been a broader demand for structural reform, especially given the objective nature needed in the justice system. With lack of diversity of identity, variety of ideology, lack of judicial accountability, the federal courts better carry out the agendas of special interest groups

²⁸⁴ Lempert, Richard. "Trump v. United States: Explaining the Outrage."

²⁸⁵ Copeland, Joseph. "Favorable Views of Supreme Court Remain near Historic Low." *Pew Research Center*.

²⁸⁶ Copeland.

²⁸⁷ Totenberg, Nina. "Supreme Court Overturns *Roe v. Wade*, Ending Right to Abortion Upheld for Decades."

and corporations instead of the people.²⁸⁸ One solution to this issue could be the refocus on equality and equity within education. In 2019, eight of the nine Supreme Court justices had graduated from Yale or Harvard Law School.²⁸⁹ People in such positions should be required to and have quality education, but barriers to access remain. Both of these institutions are private and require the financial background, time, and pre-existing knowledge of the strategies necessary to secure a spot in their programs. Were there to be protections and policies that provided more equitable access to education, previous underrepresented identities would be more represented in positions throughout the judicial system.

Not only would increased protections for equitable access to education affect positions like justices, but the diversification would occur at the micro-level as well. The Black Lives Matter movement and the Stop Asian Hate movement over the course of the coronavirus pandemic made it apparent that minority groups were negatively impacted by institutions supposedly dedicated to serving them. In June of 2023, the Supreme Court in the cases *Students for Fair Admissions v. University of North Carolina* and *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* ruled to overturn the precedent set by *Grutter v. Bollinger* in 2003.²⁹⁰ The decision rolled back affirmative action, ruling that colleges and universities no longer consider race in admission processes. Those who argue against affirmative action believe that evaluation should not favor race, while those for affirmative action believe such policies are needed to address systemic inequities. Although the former perspective is understandable, it is plainly seen that some minority groups are still discriminated against and struggle to access the same

²⁸⁸ Root, Danielle, and Sam Berger. “Structural Reforms to the Federal Judiciary.”

²⁸⁹ Root and Berger.

²⁹⁰ “Unpacking the Impact of the Supreme Court’s Affirmative Action Ruling | Rennie Center.”

opportunities in comparison to majority groups. To diversity positions in the judicial system along with the broader job market, affirmative action and similar policies need to be reinstated. It is optimistic to believe the United States no longer needs policies regarding race, but not realistic when the history of American colonization and discrimination is considered.

Checks and Balances

The failures of American domestic institutions directly correlate to the inadequate use of checks and balances. The Constitution originally aimed to distribute power, but ultimately the current political branches seek to hoard available power for selective gain. It is evident given recent events and how political scientists identify the growing discontent of the American people on both sides of the aisle, that action is needed. Democracy is not solely defined as voting, and although the current President at the time of this report is the result of the people's voice, not every citizen has access to the institutional knowledge nor the ability to vote for this role to accurately reflect the health of American democracy. Amidst his second term, the public feels unsure about their immigration status, whether their basic rights will be protected as seen among the trans community, and uneasy about how their identities will be treated by the government. These are all indicators of the environment the United States provides for democratic backsliding.

Unlike other countries experiencing democratic backsliding, the United States is a wealthy, established democracy.²⁹¹ As an outlier, it is a unique asset to global democratic backsliding. The rise of populism is one example, contributing to the election of President Trump, but not exclusive to the American experience. Countries including India, Brazil, the

²⁹¹ Carothers, Thomas, and Benjamin Press. "Understanding and Responding to Global Democratic Backsliding."

Philippines, and El Salvador have all also seen presidents come to power because of populism.²⁹²

Polarization is the more harmful effect of populism, which in the United States helps Trump garner extreme political support. Researchers investigating the causes of democratic backsliding have found that the leaders of democratic states are some of the greatest threats to democracy.²⁹³ Current domestic institutions, growing inequality, and intensifying polarization all perpetuate democratic backsliding, but world leaders are the ones who continue to employ them. The bridge between the public and their leaders needs to be constructed early on in order to avoid dissatisfaction being wielded to nurture radicalization.

To construct this bridge, as noted in previous sections, changes need to be made at the national, state, and local levels. Lobbying reforms to improve the connection between the public and policy makers, along with the diversification of policy makers themselves through improved access to education are the beginnings of such change. In an ideal world, the right change could happen in an instance. However, this is not the reality of the American governing body, nor should it be. Slow change needs to occur to understand the positive and negative effects alike on different interest groups. This slowness is witnessed and celebrated with the bureaucracy of checks and balances, for instance the passing of bills between the Senate and House, as the power to make change instantaneously could be used maliciously. To prevent misuse, a balance needs to be struck between assessing policy and implementing it.

Conclusion

Democratic health is something that needs to be continuously improved. Especially with institutions established centuries ago, the evaluation and reform of systems is needed to address

²⁹² Carothers and Press.

²⁹³ Carother and Press.

issues the framers could not have taken account for. The division between public approval and the functioning of United States' institutions is unignorable. It is urgent to address because without public approval, democracy is no longer upheld. Without democracy, the nation will suffer irreversible political, economic, and sociocultural damage, losing public trust. Democratic backsliding, polarization, and inadequate use of checks and balances need to be put to an end. This section demonstrates as such to provide an assessment of the current effectiveness of American democratic institutions. The state of democracy demands changes to connect the public with its governing body directly and indirectly. To ensure institutional effectiveness, domestic institutions must improve thus nurturing democracy within and outside American borders. Beyond addressing polarization within institutions, populism also needs to be addressed as polarization is one of its byproducts in order to improve the health of American democracy.

American Institutions & Polarization Policy Options

Change is necessary at the institutional level to increase public interest and approval thus cultivating democracy

I. Lobbying Reform.

- a. Specifying language of the Foreign Agent Registration Act (FARA).**
- b. Acting in accordance with the recommendations of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).**

II. Diversification.

- a. Reinstating affirmative action and similar policies.**
- b. Improving access to education to address systemic inequities.**

Populism: The Issue within the United States' Political Parties

A major issue within the United States, as well as many other parts of the world, is the concept of populist political groups; in other words, the far left and radical right divisions that represent the current United States political spectrum. The division between the Democrats and Republicans growing farther apart through populism is an issue that needs addressing because of the negative political environment it has created as well as the difficulty of compromise. There are multiple factors that have led to the current state of the country's politics, especially due to its political parties evolving into extreme versions of themselves, from issues such as economic hardship to lack of political education down to lessening trust in the system. Factors such as these have led to populism developing a strong presence in the country which negatively reflects on the nation's standard and value of democracy. Populism should thus be broken down in hopes of understanding the reasons it has become extremist to be able to lessen these radical effects and be able to concentrate on the true goal of populism which is to create a fair balance between politicians and citizens.

Prior to addressing populism in the United States, or anywhere in the world for that matter, the concept of populism should be analyzed. To its truest definition, populism is "A political philosophy or movement that represents or is claimed to represent the interest of ordinary people against the establishment."²⁹⁴ In many known cases, the establishment was the political system, often ruled by elites. Populism's first presence in the United States was in 1891 when the People's Party, also known as the Populist Party, was formed and the origins of the party, as well as the term populism, was triggered by difficult times because of the gold standard

²⁹⁴ *Definition of POPULISM.*

and railroad corporations.²⁹⁵ The party was established in hopes of creating reforms, specifically through political and economic changes. Populism was thus born to represent the groups of people whose purpose and goals were to represent the average citizen and do what is best for them.

Populism, Today, in the United States

Modern-day populism is still based on the belief that there is an improper balance between the elite rule (politicians) and the non-elite average citizens.²⁹⁶ Populist from both sides of the United States political spectrum believe that "...the political procedures in place have been corrupted by politicians acting on behalf of selfish (or special) interests and that, therefore, the produced outcomes do not respond to citizen's needs."²⁹⁷ The difference between Democratic and Republican populists is that Democrats believe the solution is holding politicians accountable as they work within their role and Republicans judge the politicians on whether the outcome aligns with the will of the people.²⁹⁸ A common idea that the parties share is that citizens should be more involved in the political process, almost as if a direct democracy. From there, current populism is more than just attempting to hold government officials responsible; populism within the two parties has transformed into a concept that prioritizes their adversaries rather than the common threat which was the disproportion between political elites and average citizens.

Today, populism can be separated into two broad divisions: the radical left and radical right. Both sides of the political spectrum are based on populist ideas, meaning they want and

²⁹⁵ Fuentes, J. F. *Populism: The Timeline of a Concept*.

²⁹⁶ Mohrenberg, S., Et al. *Love at first sight? Populist attitudes and support for direct democracy*.

²⁹⁷ Mohrenberg, S., Et al.

²⁹⁸ Mohrenberg, S., Et al.

fight for what is in the best interest of the people themselves. However, the division is built on the foundation of who the group sees as their adversary; “...for left populists it is economic elites; for right populists it is non-white others, by extension the state itself.”²⁹⁹ With the basis of their foes, the two populist parties always seem to contradict themselves, causing a massive division within the American political presence and system. American populism has become an interchangeable term with extremism fueling the two sides of the radical left and radical right.

Over the last few decades, the Republican Party of the United States has prioritized rebutting with their opponents above any other problem on their agenda and thus has reconstructed itself to become a part of their manifesto. An excellent example of the radical right prioritizing their foes, being “...non-whites and by extent, the state itself,” can be seen with President Trump and his election in 2016.³⁰⁰ President Trump has always carried his campaigns with a heavy focus on the working class and promising to help the lives of the average Americans; there is no question that the Republican Party via President Trump has strong populist tendencies as they promote helping average Americans. The issue with the modern Republican Party, especially with President Trump’s administration, is their extremism. Many political scholars have agreed that President Trump won with a campaign and platform that had “...strong nationalist and authoritarian populist tendencies.”³⁰¹ Additionally, President Trump has been known to make outrageous remarks about different groups of people such as Latin Americans, Muslims, immigrants, women and others.³⁰² Even within his rallies, physical assault

²⁹⁹ Lowndes, J. *Populism in the United States*.

³⁰⁰ Lowndes, J.

³⁰¹ Rodriguez-Pose, A. *Golfing with Trump. Social capital, decline, inequality, and the rise of populism in the US*.

³⁰² Lowndes, J.

from his followers onto black or Latino individuals was a common occurrence.³⁰³ Additionally, when President Trump's term was ending, the storming of the U.S. Capital on January 6, 2021, by many of his supporters, crossed a line, proving the extremes they are willing to go to. President Trump's term, from 2017 to 2021, was overall constructed on the foundation of far-right radicalism.

In addition to President Trump's term between 2017 to 2021, his campaign and the first few weeks of his second term in office, were once more established on the basis of far-right populism. On his first day in office on January 20th, 2025, he signed 25 executive orders.³⁰⁴ Some of these orders, including attempting to end birthright citizenships, are considered controversial. Additionally, about ten of those orders were targeted towards border security and immigration alone.³⁰⁵ These orders are based on the promises President Trump made to the public concerning removing undocumented immigrants by taking a more direct and aggressive approach; the new methods included allowing the U.S. to deport people without a court hearing if they were arrested, leaving no time to prove that they've been in the United States for at least two years.³⁰⁶ These new approaches to immigration have been causing backlash from a large number of the general public, feeling as though "Nobody is safe. Everybody [should] watch their back."³⁰⁷ With all of President Trump's new orders pertaining to immigration as well as other issues, at the time of this report his office has not gotten around to addressing other issues his campaign promised to address, such as inflation.³⁰⁸ Ultimately, it is too early to say whether

³⁰³ Lowndes, J.

³⁰⁴ Klein, E. *Let's Get to the Marrow of What Trump Just Did*.

³⁰⁵ Klein, E.

³⁰⁶ Klein, E.

³⁰⁷ Klein, E.

³⁰⁸ Klein, E.

President Trump's second term will do more harm than good but reflecting on his first campaign as well as the beginning of his second, the Trump administration is focusing extensively on their foes and driving the radical right deep into extremist populism.

Although the idea of populism is most often linked to the Republican Party within the United States, it is also seen within the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party has become more left-leaning and has morphed itself into a far-left party. The modern-day Democratic Party has characterized itself as strong supporters for a variety of beliefs including, but not limited to, pro-abortion, pro-immigration, pro-LGBTQ, and more. Those that stand with these arguments find themselves in positions where they cannot and will not cooperate with those with whom they disagree.³⁰⁹ Additionally, the Democratic Party that is characterized as being a far-left party has created an environment in which liberalism limits and weakens national identity.³¹⁰ This can become an issue when citizens of the United States do not see the importance of being part of a larger picture, that being the nation, which leads to a strong sense of individualism. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that many American universities are liberal institutions which creates a dominance within the education field³¹¹; there is already a notion that those who are more educated tend to affiliate themselves with the democratic party, thus most institutions being liberal adds fuel to fire. And although Republicans tend to be correlated to populism more often, the Democratic Party is just as populist.

³⁰⁹ Mearsheimer, J. J. *Liberalism and Nationalism in Contemporary America*.

³¹⁰ Mearsheimer, J. J.

³¹¹ Mearsheimer, J. J.

Why Has Populism Increased in the United States?

Comparing the two parties in the United States, “Democrats and Republicans are farther apart ideologically today than any time in the past 50 years”³¹²; there are a handful of things that have changed within the last few decades that could have triggered this movement, one of which, being the economy. To break down this reasoning, “The loss of economic prosperity in a region and weak growth in household income...” results in citizens aligning themselves with more extreme groups.³¹³ The reason for the economic decline stems from a variety of factors including globalization, the 2008 recession, the COVID19 pandemic, etc. The correlation between a weak economy and rise in populism is tied to the fact that wealth in the country is polarizing which results in increasing support for extreme anti-system or pro-economic groups. The weakening economy and increased inflation therefore increases populism for both the radical left and radical rights. Whether the citizen chooses either side of the scale lies with whom they believe is at fault, given that the liberal left believe it is the system or economic elites, and the radical right say it is the non-right or the state.³¹⁴

By directly taking a look at the radical right, two major factors for the increase in populism include low social capital, as well as high interpersonal inequality.³¹⁵ Social relationships are needed for America’s society and democracy, however, isolation is a common theme with the United States in this modern time.³¹⁶ There was once a generation where communities were tight-knit, and one could rely on their peers for help. The removal of these

³¹² DeSilver, D. *The polarization in today’s Congress has roots that go back decades.*

³¹³ Schutze, S., & tze. *Left Behind Together and Voting for Populism: Regional Out-Migration, Civic Engagement and the Electoral Success of Populist Radical Right Parties.*

³¹⁴ Lowndes, J.

³¹⁵ Rodriguez-Pose, A.

³¹⁶ Rodriguez-Pose, A.

connections has left Americans in a frenzy trying to find a group they belong to. There is not one specific reason to explain increasing social isolation, moreover, the population is increasing and many still do not know their neighbors. This phenomenon may be attributed to the heightened social media presence, generational differences, or perhaps both. Regardless of the cause, many people experience isolation and seek a sense of belonging, which leads to people free-riding or being involved in group-think within political groups which can most often be seen with the Republican Party.³¹⁷ Secondly, interpersonal inequality can be seen as a threat to democracy which is directly tied to being a driver of populism.³¹⁸ There have been a handful of wedges in society, one being race which can be recognized through "...the strong undercurrent of racism in American society."³¹⁹ The argument of race driving the parties apart can also be seen through wealth as "Republicans use white identity to defend wealth inequality."³²⁰ Additionally, the heavy racist connotations of the Republican Party is more clearly seen through actions such as President Trump's attempt to end birthright citizenship and the multiple signed orders about immigration control on his first day in office of his second term.³²¹ It is also important to note that race is not the only type of inequality in the United States, as previously mentioned, the difference in wages is another drive of inequality as well as views on sex, global warming, international politics, and more. As differences become more split, so do the two parties.

³¹⁷ Rodriguez-Pose, A.

³¹⁸ Rodriguez-Pose, A.

³¹⁹ Rodrik, D. *Why Does Globalization Fuel Populism? Economics, Culture, and the Rise of Right-Wing Populism.*

³²⁰ Rodrik, D.

³²¹ Klein, E.

Why Populism is a Downward Spiral

Populism in the United States presents several challenges beyond the increasing polarization of the two major political parties. A major issue concerning populism in the United States is that it creates a deviation from the median voter theorem.³²² The concept believes the two political parties will converge on the center ground especially when it comes time to election to better appeal to a wider set of ideologies.³²³ In other words, politicians, and political parties as a whole, will move inward on the scale to please more people. With the problem of populism in the United States, both the Democratic and Republican Party are becoming more extreme and moving outward on the scale; this leaves less room for the parties and politicians to uphold the median voter theorem. If the median voter theorem does not happen, only one political party will have supremacy at a time on any given term, law, or policy leaving more people unhappy with the current political world than if the median voter theorem was still happening.

Understanding that modern-day politics in the United States will only ever please one group and not another, it is clear that a majority of Americans are unhappy; this unhappiness can quickly turn into anger and then aggression. Over recent decades, and most especially within the 21st century, aggressive behavior stemming from political discourse has become a common occurrence which is seen from both sides of the United States political spectrum. This aggression comes in the form of physical harm, threats, and verbal aggression.³²⁴ There are many ways of triggering aggressive behavior, but it mostly stems down to arguments from two opposing sides of the spectrum. Additionally, politicians or partisans who themselves behave aggressively are

³²² Figueira, F. *Why the current Peak in Populism in the US and Europe? Populism as a Deviation in the Median Voter Theorem.*

³²³ Figueira, F.

³²⁴ Kalmoe, N., & Mason, L. *Radical American Partisanship: Mapping Violent Hostility, Its Causes, and the Consequences for Democracy.*

more likely to endorse political violence, which makes matters entirely worse.³²⁵ Now, it is important to address that there has always been violence in the world, especially within the United States, but the extensive role in which populism has played in recent politics has created a more high-strung and overall dangerous environment. It is evident that things need to change.

Is Populism Only an American Problem?

While populism has been increasing in the United States through the division of the two political parties, the United States is not the only nation with this issue; countries around the world are experiencing an increasing number of populist parties particularly in contemporary Europe. Scholars Laurent Bernhard and Hanspeter Kriesi researched populist parties in eleven different Western Europe countries on both the left and right side of the political spectrum. They found that each country had at least one radical populist party on the left and/or the right side.³²⁶ Additionally, within each of these countries, the radical populist party was seen as established and powerful players within their given political world.³²⁷ Countries in which there are radical populist parties that hold strong positions include the Five Star Movement and Lega Nord parties in Italy, the Alternative for Germany Party in Germany, the French National Front in France and many more.^{328;329;330} Additionally, the United Kingdom is often described as being influenced by populism, especially through the 2016 Brexit referendum.³³¹ Reflecting upon these examples, it

³²⁵ Kalmoe, N., & Mason, L.

³²⁶ Bernhard, L., & Kriesi, H. *Populism in election times: A comparative analysis of 11 countries in Western Europe*.

³²⁷ Bernhard, L., & Kriesi, H.

³²⁸ Bernhard, L., & Kriesi, H.

³²⁹ Rodrik, D.

³³⁰ Schutze, S., & tze.

³³¹ Rodrik, D.

is evident that populism is not only on the rise in the United States, but in foreign countries especially within Europe.

Within each of these European countries, there are populist political groups that are key players in their own country. Firstly, within Italy the Five Star Movement and Lega have been involved in the national government with major success due to populist campaign communication as well as economic and financial crisis.³³² In Germany, AfD was founded as a response to the European financial crisis and although it is not technically classified as a right-wing populist party, their rejection of the Euro, views on political elites and positions on immigration and family has aligned themselves within populist beliefs.³³³ Moving on to France, a major basis of support for the French National Front have been on aversion to Muslim and African immigrants.³³⁴ Lastly, the pro-Brexit vote in Britain is largely associated with rise in the populist right stemming from anti-immigrant and anti-refugee sentiments.³³⁵ A common theme within these populist groups are anti-immigrant values as well as hardships due to economic decline, however, neither are necessarily invoked because of populism but rather became associated with populism over time.

Comparing the United States to the four mentioned countries, it is difficult to pinpoint a strong similarity to explain why populism is a prevalent issue within the countries. Though each of these countries is described as being part of the western world, each individual nation has a different political system set in place: The United States is a constitutional federal republic, the United Kingdom is a parliamentary constituency monarchy, Italy is a parliamentary republic,

³³² Bernhard, L., & Kriesi, H.

³³³ Schutze, S., & tze.

³³⁴ Schutze, S., & tze.

³³⁵ Schutze, S., & tze.

Germany is a federal parliamentary republic, and France is a semi-presidential republic.³³⁶ A loose similarity between these countries, other than the fact that they are characterized as being part of the Western World, is that these countries were strongly affected by economic crises, especially the 2008 recession.³³⁷ Although this similarity is important, there are many countries in the world, some would even argue that a majority of countries have been affected by the economy in the recent past and not all of them are experiencing rises in populism. Economic issues may cause an increase in populism, but it is not the sole explanation. What can be deciphered from this is that populism is not necessarily an issue that stems from a specific political system nor a political party. To try and lessen extreme populism, a solution that does not necessarily involve altering the political system must be issued. Populism stems from the people and targeted solutions need to be brought on to the citizens and their understanding of the world and society as a whole.

By design, if the United States tackled the problem of populism in the nation, it would create a ripple effect to other nations dealing with populism. This is mostly because the United States still plays a hegemonic role in the world and many look to the nation as a role model. Additionally, the United States politics plays a major role in many different organizations and other nations, addressing an issue such as populism would in turn affect these groups as well. Lastly, simply addressing populism as a problem could create many positive effects as this would trigger other countries to look within and consider whether populism is a problem within their own country. All in all, addressing populism and attempting to fix this issue would help the United States as well as the many other nations dealing with the same problem.

³³⁶ CIA. *Government type—The World Factbook*.

³³⁷ Bernhard, L., & Kriesi, H.

Conclusion

Populism in the United States has been around since the 1800s but has had a strong spike in the past few elections. Populism was first created on the basis that there was an improper scale between the average citizen and the political elites and thus the Populist Party was born as a party by the people, for the people.³³⁸ Over time, and especially within the last few decades, populism has created a new definition for itself where, now, the political parties in the United States have become more and more extreme, leading to the radical Democrats and the radical Republicans.³³⁹ It has come to the point where the parties will prioritize handling their foes rather than focus on their followers; for example, the Republican party sees non-whites as well as the system as a whole as their enemies and the Democrats sees economic elites as their adversaries.³⁴⁰ Additionally, the two parties see each other as rivals and will often times get into conflicts with each other, this takes place on a day-to-day personal matter as well as through the politicians. Comparing populism in today's world and populism in its conception, it is almost as if they are two completely different ideas.

It is evident that today's version of populism in the United States has extremist parties, and there are harsh consequences that have come from this. The parties prioritize dealing with their foes immensely and have created an unstable political atmosphere in the nation, especially amongst people from different sides of the political spectrum. Additionally, another strong consequence has been the straying from the median voter theorem; when the two main political

³³⁸ Fuentes, J. F.

³³⁹ Bernhard, L., & Kriesi, H.

³⁴⁰ Lowndes, J.

parties were closer together on the spectrum, parties as well as politicians could cater themselves to median voters which would end up pleasing more people rather than just a niche area of the scale.³⁴¹ With the two parties pushing farther apart, at any given moment in politics, there is a large portion of citizens unhappy with the current administration, laws, policies, etc. Modern day populism has created an environment in which there are winners and losers and no in between.

The issue of populism stems from multiple locations, but a major driver comes from the people and thus any solution towards solving populism must be directed towards the citizens. A strong way to lessen populism can begin with strengthening political education in the United States which can take form in two ways, either through the already established education system of K-12, colleges, and universities or through civic engagement. Regardless of which form, both versions should focus on improving the knowledge a citizen has on the history of the United States as well as a history of U.S. politics, how the government works, as well as current events. This can be done through different means including lessons, public resources, public engagement, improved educational material as well as easy access, and more. The improvement of political education in the United States will allow for future or current citizens to make their own educated decisions which will, in-turn, lessen populism in the country. From there, even the attempt to address the issue of populism in the United States will affect other states dealing with the same issue as the U.S. still holds hegemonic power and is involved in many organizations and holds power over many nations. Populism is a prominent problem in many countries, including the United States, and has already been seen to cause many negative effects, yet there is always hope for improving the political system.

³⁴¹ Figueira, F.

The issue with populism in the United States stems from the new, extreme tendency of both parties; there is not one, single solution to fixing populism, but rather a handful of different ideas with the strongest alteration lying within the world of education. Democracy stems from citizens willing to be active in the political world, however, one must need to be educated, willing and equipped to influence politics through elections.³⁴² In order for citizens to be able to make these important decisions, they must be educated in American politics, government, and current events. A way to implement a stronger education system that tackles these three subjects will allow citizens to make educated decisions for themselves, as well as their nation, which will eventually lead to a lesser extreme-populist country.

Improving education targeting the knowledge of the U.S. political system can lead to the lessening of populism in the country. The link between political education and less populism will be to allow more citizens to have a more well-rounded knowledge base which would allow people to understand both sides of the political spectrum. From there, a citizen can still choose the party that best fits them yet understand the views of the other party. Optimally, a more understanding political world would lead to less extreme views, which is the issue within populism. Additionally, it is always a wise choice for a citizen to understand the parties to be able to decide for themselves where they align, rather than jumping on to the bandwagon. Education is overall a great tool that can be used as a response to various problems in the United States, especially politically.

³⁴² Breslin, T. *Rethinking citizenship education for political literacy*.

Populism Policy Options

Proposals to Lessen Extremism from Populism

I. Creating a national educational system touching on American politics directed towards young adults or rising voters

- a. Department of Education creating a non-partisan federal curriculum teaching students on U.S. history, politics, and current events implemented through the K-12 systems**
- b. Implementing resources that are easily accessible through the school's libraries and/or other sources**
- c. Uphold non-partisanship through every part of this reform, especially through the teaching**

II. Strengthening the nation's civic engagement touching on education of American politics directed towards all ages

- a. Strengthening local outreach touching on education of the American political system, current events, and U.S. history through public libraries, local cities and town halls, and other sources**
- b. Strengthening federal outreach focusing on education of the American political system through online resources that are easily accessible**
- c. Uphold non-partisanship through all resources**

Human Rights: Foundation for Freedom

“The inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world” - ICCPR

As a nation, the focus must be enabling life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for those on the home front as well as abroad. Protecting inalienable rights leads to greater stability, reducing violence, promotes equality, and fosters social, economic, and cultural innovation. These are American values, but we have a duty to foster these freedoms not only domestically, but abroad due to the U.S.’s hegemonic position in the world order. Humanity across the globe cannot progress when their dignity and autonomy is stripped through the violation of human rights. The United States is not immune to human rights violations and must work towards improving internal systems before turning to the global stage. As a hegemonic power in the international community, it is the United States’ duty to protect national security and cultivate development in foreign countries through upholding the standard of respecting human rights. If the U.S. is to hold the international community accountable, the nation must first be accountable for its own actions.

This section will highlight the use of human rights as outlined in the United Declaration of Human Rights supplemented by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.³⁴³ The United States should recognize that human rights are not universal and that the ones that should take priority differ across nations and cultures, as there is no one direct blueprint for all. Due to this report’s position as a Western nation and this subsection focusing on policy making from the western perspective, there is recognition of potential the western bias in choosing which

³⁴³ United Nations (General Assembly). “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.”

human rights to focus primarily on. However, in an effort to combat this bias, the United Declaration of Human Rights was curated by representatives with varying legal and cultural backgrounds from across the globe. The ICCPR in contrast is an agreement across ratifying nations to uphold said human rights and includes civil rights in addition to the rights outlined in the UDHR. It offers a more ideal comprehensive analysis of human rights and legislative steps towards enforcement. The expectation is to provide solutions to improve human rights disparities across communities, but it is a long journey, and these issues will only be solved through compounding legislation and policy with longevity.

This subsection will be broken down into two key sections: domestic and foreign human rights. Domestically, this section focuses on uniquely American human rights issues: mass incarceration, gun violence, and accessible health care. Each issue provides background and its relation to protecting national security interests. The second key section focuses on foreign affairs. The focus incorporates the effect of the United States on the sphere of war as it pertains to human rights and the declining international perception of the United States' commitment to upholding human rights. Recognizing that many programs have failed, and these issues have been ingrained in American society, the discussion will be centered on why this happens and what will be different about this policy recommendation. For the last subsection of foreign affairs, there will be a focus on the international community and the importance of holding international organizations accountable. In order to hold organizations accountable, supporting civil society is critical. Foreign affairs conclude with an explanation of civil society's importance and the structure used when analyzing it. Finally, the policy proposal focuses on solutions which fulfill the priorities of national interests as it pertains to human rights: a more secure, stable, and

prosperous home front and global community in which the United States can advance its national interests.

Domestic

The United States faces many human rights issues as a diverse and complex nation; however, three issues are experienced as uniquely American. Mass incarceration, weak gun laws, and inaccessible healthcare are three human rights violations that present most dominantly and impact American society most distinctively. These three human rights issues prevent already marginalized groups from achieving stability and prosperity barring them from being innovative and meaningful contributors to national interest. These changes are notoriously difficult to address due to the United States' capitalist focus and market-based systems. Addressing these issues cannot be fixed with a singular policy. Acknowledging this challenge, the approach to these matters focuses on supporting organizations which understand the nuance and can provide stable and effective solutions with longevity.

I. Mass Incarceration and Recidivism

Mass incarceration is a result of the prison complex in the United States, which hinders the growth and development of American society. When speaking to the NAACP about the state of the United States' prison system, former President Obama described it as an “aspect of American life that remains particularly skewed by race and wealth, a source of inequity that has ripple effects on families and communities and ultimately on the nation.”³⁴⁴ More Americans are imprisoned in the criminal justice system than ever before, surging from 1.8 million people in 1980 to 7.3 million people in 2007 following harsh policies stemming from the Reagan

³⁴⁴ Wakefield, Sara, Hedwig Lee, and Christopher Wildeman. “Introduction: Tough on Crime, Tough on Families? Criminal Justice and Family Life in America.”

administration's war on drugs and Clinton's Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. When those incarcerated serve terms unequal to the crime they committed, this has lasting effects on American society. Felons are barred from some certain jobs, jury service, public services, and voting. Those in the prison system are not provided with sufficient life skills to find adequate work in the job market, keeping them financially stunted. The difficulties facing inmates following reentry to noninstitutionalized society cause them to have higher chances of returning to crime.³⁴⁵ The faults in the prison system not only impacts those currently facing sentences but has generational impacts. Parental incarceration increases a child's likelihood that they will also be incarcerated due to weak family ties, lack of visits, and lack of support in maintaining a family dynamic while developing as a member of society.³⁴⁶ Improving the consequences of systemic inequality in the criminal justice system will not be fixed with a single policy or even a single administration, however, proposed policy in this section that strives to improve recidivism through encouraging a foundation for skilled, educated, contributing members of society following incarceration.

II. Gun Violence in Childhood

Gun violence remains a pressing issue in the United States, with significant physical and psychological impacts on children, which can reach them in school, at home, in their communities, or through the media.³⁴⁷ Exposure to gun violence results in childhood PTSD, increases violent tendencies, desensitizes children to violence, and can cause children to

³⁴⁵ Raphael, Steven. "Incarceration and Prisoner Reentry in the United States."

³⁴⁶ Raphael.

³⁴⁷ Garbarino, James, Catherine P. Bradshaw, and Joseph A. Vorrasi. "Mitigating the Effects of Gun Violence on Children and Youth."

withdraw from society.³⁴⁸ In school and in their communities is where children should feel the safest, and where their development occurs most significantly. The United States must protect these safe spaces for children and reduce the risk of exposure to gun violence at a young age.

Among different environments in which children may experience gun violence, school shootings have increased in frequency in the 21st century, highlighting a failure in policy response. Media coverage can amplify these incidents, resulting in copycat actions. Additionally due to the spontaneous nature and inconsistency between motivations for violence makes it difficult to profile perpetrators.³⁴⁹ The second amendment protects the right to bear arms and these children clearly do not obtain these firearms legally thus this subsection will not be addressing the legality of firearms, but rather mitigating actions the government can take to reduce the impact of gun violence on children. If children do not feel safe in school, they will not reach their fullest potential in development academically or socially. By stunting their growth by unsupportive systems and undermining the reality of gun violence impacts, we impair their ability to be innovating contributing members of society once they are of adult age. In accordance with the national interest of having a safe and free society, it is of the utmost importance to protect children as they cannot protect themselves and address this growing issue. Access to mental health resources has the potential to reduce the impacts of gun violence exposure and mitigate gun violence in schools and communities.

III. Health Care Accessibility

The United States has a complex healthcare system, and limited access to affordable healthcare has impacted the quality of life for many Americans. As a developed nation, ensuring

³⁴⁸ Garbarino.

³⁴⁹ Borum, Randy, Dewey G. Cornell, William Modzeleski, and Shane R. Jimerson. "What Can Be Done About School Shootings? A Review of the Evidence."

the health of citizens is essential and the financial barriers placed on necessary resources only inhibits the ability for individuals to continue contributing to national interests. In the United States, the for-profit health medical model has been criticized for providing inferior care for inflated prices. Interacting with healthcare as a market leads to unscrupulous medical institutions and disadvantages institutions that are unwilling or unable to focus their efforts on profitability.³⁵⁰ As of 2008, 47 million Americans were uninsured and medical costs sent nearly a million everyday Americans into bankruptcy annually.³⁵¹ The right to health is outlined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as a necessary human right. National health policies that focus on market incentives are violating this human right and preventing American citizens from living a free life due to the economic burden or inability to receive care. Nearly half of Americans state they have delayed or skipped medical care due to the high prices. People are diagnosed with cancer at later stages and take fewer necessary medications than those with lower-cost medical care. Those that are suffering from severe illness turn down treatment when the prices rise.³⁵² Similarly to aiding the mass incarceration crisis and preventing gun violence, the market-based health care system in the United States is systemic and a result of capitalist systems which will not be fixed through a single policy, but rather many organizations working together to provide resources to struggling Americans. Restoring wide-spread access to healthcare would result in a more stable American society and return dignity to those struggling with health issues as well as keep the population healthy to continue contributing in a meaningful way to the communities around them.

³⁵⁰ Himmelstein, David U., and Steffie Woolhandler. "PRIVATIZATION IN A PUBLICLY FUNDED HEALTH CARE SYSTEM: THE U.S. EXPERIENCE."

³⁵¹ Himmelstein.

³⁵² Cutler, David. "The World's Costliest Health Care."

Domestic change and reform should reflect necessary human rights within the U.S. before focusing abroad, as the United States has as a hegemony in the world order. The United States sets an international standard and if it cannot hold the government and systems accountable to protect the peace and freedom of the people, then it cannot expect other nations to follow in its footsteps on the international stage. These problems will not be fixed overnight, but it is critical to take steps towards improving these human rights violations to operate in accordance with national priorities as it pertains to human rights: stability, innovation, freedom, and peace. These goals cannot be reached without prioritizing domestic systems.

Foreign Affairs

I. America at War

The United States has the largest and most influential military power in the world; thus it is in this report's purview to address engagements abroad and war and its consequences. Soldiers represent the United States abroad in and out of uniform, therefore, it is in national interest to hold the military to the international standard for upholding peace and longevity in war and actions on foreign territory. Violating human rights abroad is not solely an American issue, however, the United States has the power to prevent further violations, as of the current state of power in the world.

The United States has undermined efforts to improve war crimes and crimes against humanity in the scope of war. By refusing to join or support the International Criminal Court, the United States sets the precedent that it is above the law and inhibits enforcement of laws preventing genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.³⁵³ This increases the difficulty to

³⁵³ Johansen, Robert C. "The Impact of US Policy toward the International Criminal Court on the Prevention of Genocide, War Crimes, and Crimes against Humanity."

hold other nations to a certain standard when it appears the United States is outside the rules of the international courts. War is already a devastating aspect of foreign affairs, destroying economies, land, and entire cultures through violence, therefore adding human rights violations unnecessarily increases the impact of war on these communities. Conflict often arises from unstable communities and competing interests between communities. By restoring the dignity and representation of these groups, the United States can commit to building up stability and decreasing its conflicts in foreign affairs. By setting a standard of following human rights protections and international systems set in place to uphold them, the United States would lead the world's militaries in being held accountable. It is in the U.S.'s national interest to encourage stability abroad leading to prosperity and innovation which in turn elevates the quality of life across the globe. As a nation, the United States cannot ignore its position as a hegemonic power and the waterfall effects of its interactions on the battlefield and abroad.

II. International Perception of the United States

In reflection of the Israel War in Gaza, the United States has been criticized for its role in upholding human rights. This raises concerns about the United States' ability to contribute to international human rights and whether it is the standard of equality for the world. In order to be considered a serious beacon of human rights law, the United States must reform its position in Israel's war in Gaza to improve its relations with the globe.

As of October 4, 2024, more than 41,000 Palestinians in Gaza had been killed, according to the Hamas-controlled health ministry there. Additionally, about 90% of Gaza's some 2.1 million residents have been displaced. Most of Gaza's remaining population face unsanitary, overcrowded conditions alongside acute shortages of food, water, medical care, and other essential supplies and services. Transporting aid through crossings and Israeli checkpoints and

then delivering it has been facing obstacles and unsafe transit, contributing to high levels of food insecurity³⁵⁴. The war in Gaza is a clear violation of human rights and the United States' position in it has influenced the world's perception of American ability to uphold human rights.

The United States plans to withdraw from the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) under the Trump Administration. Amanda Klasing, National Director, Government Relations & Advocacy with Amnesty International USA, stated this demonstrates to the world President Trump's "blatant disregard for human rights and cooperation."³⁵⁵ Shifts in U.S. policy on human rights have influenced international perceptions of the country's commitment to both global and domestic human rights standards.³⁵⁶ It is perceived that the United States does not want a seat at the table in developing human rights policy and the Trump administration has no intention of improving human rights at home or abroad.

The United States must repair its international image in maintaining human rights. Human rights and democracy go hand in hand and cannot exist without the other. As a democracy, maintaining freedoms and upholding individual liberties is at the core of the United States' national values, thus is in the best interest of the nation. Ensuring human rights creates a society in which people can contribute, innovate, and motivate without fear of their basic human dignities being stripped. In return, the government must provide protections over their unalienable rights. The United States is being criticized by the international community for practices discouraging human rights. If the nation aims to continue being a hegemonic power and leader in developed nations, a focus on human rights must be restored and upheld.

³⁵⁴ Congressional Research Service. "Israel and Hamas Conflict in Brief: Overview, U.S. Policy, and Options for Congress."

³⁵⁵ "U.S. Withdrawal From UN Human Rights Council Is Performative Disregard For Human Rights."

³⁵⁶ "U.S. Withdrawal From UN Human Rights Council Is Performative Disregard For Human Rights."

III. Accountability in International Organizations

Human rights treaties are notoriously difficult to enforce and uphold on a global level, but the United States must hold organizations accountable and support efforts to build systems that can have a lasting impact on struggling communities worldwide. International human rights treaties have been considered ineffective, counterproductive, or only benefit countries that would tend to respect human rights outside of treaty membership.³⁵⁷ Human rights violations are often from leaders who choose to defect from the already emplaced laws, thus having laws outlined does not alone impact nations that would deviate from them regardless. There is a very low level of enforcement mechanisms in international human rights treaties.³⁵⁸ With little to no enforcement it cannot uphold its intentions of improving human rights. One of the human rights treaties that is the most comprehensive is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.³⁵⁹ The first step to addressing human rights in the international stage is reaching a universal definition of what human rights are. The ICCPR effectively outlines what human rights are at the forefront of maintaining human dignity and security. However, not every nation has ratified this treaty, and it lacks the ability to meaningfully enforce.

In order to increase the effectiveness of international human rights treaties, the United States must turn to non-government organizations and the power of civil society abroad. Using the framework of the ICCPR, NGOs and civil society are required to assist in reaching its full potential. The independence, flexibility, and understanding of the local community allows NGOs to support legally guaranteed human rights. They serve as the bridge between action towards a more equal community and ideas that would otherwise remain largely theoretical. By having ties

³⁵⁷ Cole, Wade M. "Mind the Gap: State Capacity and the Implementation of Human Rights Treaties."

³⁵⁸ Cole.

³⁵⁹ United Nations (General Assembly). "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights."

to the community, NGOs are more acutely aware of their needs and what implementation would benefit the community most significantly.³⁶⁰

Increasing the political capital of civil society actors and NGOs fills a critical space between the state and the market, addressing human rights in a capacity outside of the government. A strong, autonomous civil society encourages social cohesion and can hold both state and market accountable for their actions and policy, in this case specifically pertaining to upholding and violating human rights. Civil society is difficult to define, and the academic community has struggled to reach a widespread consensus on the details of what entails a “civil society.” Civil society is the public space in which people engage and interact existing outside of the market or the state and what structures support these spaces. From that definition, civil society can be interpreted in a variety of ways, the first being civil society as values and norms. Values and norms imply that society is inherently good and something that people are naturally inclined to want to be part of.³⁶¹ The next definition, which is society as a collective noun, this focuses on the formation of groups that encourage voluntary political and social involvement, all working together to improve society. Civil society as a historical moment result from historical social and political events influencing the society that exists outside of the centralized power.³⁶² When scholars view civil society as a space for action, civil society is a sphere in which people can express themselves, their passions, and their political interests for the state. It is a space that encourages people to create ideas and generate social and political movement outside the market and state.³⁶³ Lastly, civil society as an antidote to the state is the ability for civil society actors

³⁶⁰ Goel, Vaibhav, and Manoj Kr. Tripathi. “THE ROLE OF NGOs IN THE ENFORCEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS: An Overview.”

³⁶¹ Shils, Edward. “The Virtue of Civil Society.”

³⁶² Castiglione, D. “History and Theories of Civil Society: Outline of a Contested Paradigm”

³⁶³ Diamond, Larry. “Rethinking Civil Society: Toward Democratic Consolidation.”

and the civil society space to limit the powers of centralized government.³⁶⁴ It analyzes the extent to which civil society can balance the powers of the state and the market as well as hold them accountable. This definition aligns most closely with how the policy proposal will be utilizing civil society.

Civil society can more easily be broken down into the civil society diamond consisting of four categories, structure, legal, values, and impact. The key questions raised when using the diamond structure are what organizations are in place to support civil society, what networks are provided, and whether or not there are resources provided to encourage civil society. In the legal sphere, this includes what legal limitations exist on civil society, what laws and policies either inhibit or protect the civil society space. This would be the legal limitations on human rights in the United States and abroad. The values and norms of the civil society are then analyzed and whether or not they are inclusive of others into their space. As it pertains to human rights, the concerns would be who is welcome in the sphere of civil society and who has their rights protected to exercise their freedoms. In the impact category, the concerns focused on are what power does civil society have, what impacts can they make on the state and market. Their ability to stand up to the government and advocate for themselves has a direct impact on holding government organizations accountable for upholding human rights. Using the diamond structure helps analyze civil society influence and their correlation with human rights as a strong civil society increases accountability for government officials and organizations.

Human rights are undeniably critical for the progression of humanity and the advancement of the United States' national interests. Protecting the dignity of human beings encourages cultural, economic, and social innovation, reduces violence, and promotes stability

³⁶⁴ White, Gordon. "Prospects for Civil Society in China: A Case Study of Xiaoshan City."

leading to a more prosperous community and increases the capability for members of society to contribute meaningfully. The United States must hold itself accountable for upholding human rights and set the precedent for the international community. Committing to contributing to international organizations and supporting a strong civil society is crucial for setting a precedent for valuing human rights, however, the United States must first improve domestic systems and repair the international perception of U.S. national interests. Humanity cannot flourish if human dignity is not fiercely protected.

One policy will not adequately address all the issues mentioned but will rather require a multifaceted process with complex nuances for domestic and foreign causes. However, the policies proposed act as the first step to addressing human rights violations. All policies are weighted based on the priority of national security issues in alignment with human rights: a more stable, secure, and prosperous community globally and at home through systems with longevity and effective impact.

Human Rights Policy Options

I. Increase GDP Spending

- a. The United States commits 0.5% of the annual GDP to support human rights focused NGOs, civil society actors, and grassroots organizations.**
 - i. Not creating new government programs, but rather supplementing government programs with organizations that have an acute connection with the human rights violation occurring.**
 - ii. Amplifying voices of those who have experienced these violations, are connected to these violations, or are experts in the fields of these situations would have the most lasting and effective impact.**
 - iii. Strong civil society holds the market and state accountable.**
 - iv. Support innovation through funding think tanks, project proposals, and research.**

II. Join International Human Rights Organizations

- a. Join and become a participating member of the ICC and UNHRC.**
 - i. International perception of the United States' dedication to human rights has been declining; by joining these organizations the U.S. can regain credibility in the international community.**
 - ii. Holds the United States accountable for obligations to uphold human rights outside the national government.**

Conclusion

Democracy is the foundation on which the United States of America stands and needs to be upheld and improved as the world progresses. The U.S. has an obligation to secure democracy for future generations through institutions, political parties, and human rights. The international landscape perpetuates domestic issues and by addressing the problems presented in these structures, democracy will thrive. Democratic values ensure personal freedoms, institutional accountability, and representative politics.

Institutions are the backbone of American politics. The structures that were established in the Constitution to protect democracy exist for the people. Although this is still the case, institutional improvement is necessary to better serve individuals. Issues like polarization and inability to properly execute work prove the disconnect between domestic institutions with the desires of the public. To combat the failures within American institutions, the gap between government and the people needs to be bridged through the improvement of practices at national, state, and local levels. The demand for action to uphold national democracy is clear.

It has become evident of the strong correlation between an increase in populism leading to a decrease in democracy. Again, populism is seen from both sides of the American political spectrum, and it cannot be blamed on a single party. With this in mind, populism is a strong force that has created many negative effects including, but not limited to, political aggression and a deviation from the median voter theorem.³⁶⁵ Because populism was first created in the hopes of breaking the strong divide between the average citizen and the political elites, there is still a

³⁶⁵ Figueira, Filipa. "Why the Current Peak in Populism in the US and Europe? Populism as a Deviation in the Median Voter Theorem."

strong hope that populism as we now know it can switch into what its intended use was and thus fix any divergence the nation has had from its democracy.

Human rights are the building blocks of freedom by maintaining human dignity. Protecting human rights leads to stability and fosters innovation. When humans have security in their basic rights and freedoms, they can focus on politics and their contributions as a member of society improving the nation. Empowering civil society allows for an actor in between state and market to hold the government and organizations accountable for their actions as it pertains to human rights. In the international community, the United States has a responsibility to set the precedent to safeguard human rights which begins with domestic improvements and engagement in international organizations.

The United States holds a position of hegemonic power in the modern world order. It is in national interest to promote democracy and utilize the nation's powerful position to encourage representative and fair elections across the globe. Using politics, the United States can influence democratic practices, but this can only be achieved by valuing and recognizing the areas of improvement present in the political system domestically. In order to protect the liberal democratic values at the foundation of the nation, security is paramount in defending the principles of the United States.

Security

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Introduction

The United States is bordered by two vast oceans and two friendly neighbors. These geographic conditions have made the U.S. homeland almost completely impervious to foreign attacks, with Pearl Harbor and 9/11 as the only exceptions in recent history. The post-1991 security landscape was characterized by a dominant U.S. military, a strong rule-based international order, a weaker form of strength within Russia and China, and robust alliances.

However, the unipolar moment of hegemony held internationally was merely just for a moment. The reality moving forward is one where American security faces risks from great power competition, non-state actors, new forms of warfare, and cybersecurity, all while facing the global existential threat of climate change.

Indeed, the United States must leave behind its attitude of relative invulnerability that shaped the unipolar moment of the '90s, '00s, and early '10s to realistically meet the security challenges and vulnerabilities of the rapidly changing, technologically evolving, multipolar world.

To this end, the security strategy of the U.S. must consider the following. First, adapting the military to climate change, the rise of China, and hybrid warfare. Second, revising U.S. engagement abroad. Third, the hardening of U.S. critical infrastructure in light of growing vulnerabilities.

Adapting the U.S. military is crucial for protecting future security. Climate change and hybrid warfare bring new security threats that have not yet been seen before. Advancements in areas like AI alone will change the effectiveness of weapons, the responsiveness of people, and the length of battles that take place. Climate change brings upon its own set of issues as well. As the weather becomes more extreme in certain areas of the world, militaries will be forced to fight

in new conditions and to obtain old and new resources that are becoming increasingly scarce or competed for. The U.S. is also forced to consider the rise of China and acknowledge that the focus needs to be shifted from focusing on various parts of the world solely onto China and their military capabilities. China's forces and weaponry alone have grown in significant numbers, leaving the U.S. behind when it comes to issues like technological advancements.

If the U.S. military cannot adapt to these three issues, adversaries are likely to evolve and outmatch them. The U.S. military must adapt to demonstrate their ability to resist unpredictable situations and stand strong in the changes that are happening. By doing so, the U.S. military will be able to respond more effectively to conflicts that continue to arise, allowing the U.S. to deter competition and protect national interests.

Revising U.S. engagement abroad is necessary for security as well. For a long time, the U.S. has shouldered the burden of being the primary defender, serving as an intimidator for its immense power and numbers. However, this has placed a disproportionate burden on the U.S., and it needs to change. The U.S. must revise strategies to bring others up and begin an era where collaboration is the key to security. Issues are becoming increasingly globalized, security threats like cyber warfare included. As it becomes easier for threats to cross borders, the U.S. must change strategies to promote global engagement to deal with such issues at a larger level.

By expanding the role of groups like NATO, learning to adapt to bring other nations up on their own, focusing on collective deterrence, etc. the influence and stability that comes from the U.S. and her allies will increase. Collaboration allows for more resources, trust, intelligence, and knowledge to address all sorts of rising security concerns. This will show the power of a unified group that can withstand and work together to solve issues that plague not just one nation, but many.

The hardening of critical infrastructure is the final factor of this section that is critical for U.S. security. Critical infrastructure as it remains now poses serious risks to security, ranging from healthcare, to transportation, to natural resources, and so on. The U.S. needs to begin focusing on cybersecurity as a means to address these issues. Doing so allows assurance that if a system is attacked, the U.S. will be able to recover quickly and efficiently all while protecting the privacy of their citizens. In addition, an increase in accountability for the various cybersecurity systems across sectors will safeguard the U.S. from large scale disruptions that could heavily impact the daily lives of people in places like hospitals, airports, and even from environmental disasters.

The U.S. and the world are becoming increasingly digitalized, and to protect the private lives of the people, the U.S. needs to shift into allowing more cybersecurity laws. This will allow the U.S. to stand strong during attacks, showing adversaries that the nation cannot be easily brought down, and that securing the lives and wellbeing of the people are the priority.

Climate, China, and Cutting-Edge Technology: 21st Century

Military

The U.S. military, which consists of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, National Guard, and Space Force, manages and mitigates the various risks that the United States faces. It guarantees the sovereignty and security of the United States. The military also maintains a global presence, through a network of overseas bases and through the Navy. This memo will address how the military ought to adapt and evolve to meet three principal challenges. First, climate change, and the consequences it will have on the nature of threats, the need of alternative energy sources to fuel military operations and adapting to fight in more extreme environments. Second, the rise of China and rediscovered Russian aggression, and the increasingly contested notion of U.S. military primacy, the cost-balance analysis for primacy, and guaranteeing security without primacy. Finally, technological proliferation, and the impact of AI on warfare, nuclear proliferation and the U.S. deterrent, and maintaining an innovative and capable defense-industrial base.

Climate Change

Climate change and its consequences will likely be the great challenge of the 21st century. The question of a planet fit for human habitation is an existential one. A strong military on an uninhabitable planet is of little use. All actors have a role to play in fighting climate change, and this remains true for the U.S. military as well. The Department of Defense (DoD) is the single largest emitter in the Federal government, accounting for about three-quarters of its total emissions, and therefore has a role in reducing emissions.³⁶⁶ As a military organization, it also

³⁶⁶ Department of Defense, “Department of Defense Plan to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions”

has a role in mitigating and managing threats, and climate change is a threat multiplier. Its effects exacerbate existing threats and make more likely the emergence of new ones. For example, warmer and drier weather leads to conflict over access to water to ensure agriculture and the food supply.³⁶⁷ Given this, decision makers must prioritize climate considerations for the U.S. military moving forward.

First, the military must be ready to fight in more extreme conditions. Indeed, the environment shapes and constrains the operations that can be conducted on it. Land forces especially are affected. Warfare in arid environments has been at the forefront of recent conflicts, especially in the Middle East and the Sahel, and with climate change both soldiers and their equipment must adapt to even higher temperatures. Infantry, carrying heavy rifles and equipment, may suffer from heat exhaustion or heat stroke under prolonged combat in extremely high temperatures and thus lose combat effectiveness. Lighter equipment, artificial cooling or ventilation, and doctrinal and tactical changes may become necessary adaptations to climate change. Vehicles and equipment must also adapt. Hotter air is less dense, which means aircraft generate less lift. As a result, maximum payload weights decrease, and more sorties are necessary to fly in the same supply tonnage than in cooler weather.³⁶⁸ Militaries must adapt their equipment, as well as the ways in which they operate their equipment, because of climate change. This point includes military installations and infrastructure, especially those in coastal regions which could be prone to flooding. For example, F-16s may experience complications when landing on underwater runways.

³⁶⁷ Goodman, Sherri, and Pauline Baudu, "Climate Change as a "Threat Multiplier": History, Uses and Future of the Concept"

³⁶⁸ Dickinson et al., "Impacts of climate warming on maximum aviation payloads"

Second, alternative energy sources must be adopted without compromising, and if possible, improving, capabilities. It is no secret that the military is energy hungry. Its operations, dependent on exceptional mobility and logistics, demand large quantities of energy. This demand, both from operations (e.g. fueling a destroyer on patrol) and installations (e.g. electricity for an airbase), has been mostly met through fossil fuels. However, as fossil fuels are both accelerating climate change and non-renewable, the U.S. military must wean itself off oil. One of the key challenges in this domain is finding an alternative energy source for aviation. The Air Force is the thirstiest branch, whose fuel-hungry jets accounted for 80% of operational emissions and 50% of total D.O.D. emissions in 2021.³⁶⁹ This is not just the single largest share of emissions but is also the most technically difficult to replace. Aircraft need fuels with high specific energy, i.e. how much energy a fuel stores per unit of mass, and a high energy density, i.e. how much energy a fuel stores per unit of volume, to fly. With how decisive effective air power is in modern warfare, finding sustainable alternative energy sources for aviation is a priority. The difficulty in reducing military emissions lies in not giving up capabilities during the transition to alternative energy sources. While alternative energy sources may provide certain advantages, such as how a battery-electric-powered tank is almost certainly quieter than a turbine-powered tank, this cannot come at the expense of any considerable reduction in capability, such as the electric tank lacking range and posing sustainment and charging difficulties.

Third, Arctic ice melting as a result of global warming is opening up a new theater for great-power confrontation. Commercial shipping will be increasingly feasible through Arctic waters, as, without ice, they represent the shortest trade route between Western Europe and the

³⁶⁹ Department of Defense., “Department of Defense Plan to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions ”

Asia-Pacific. Where trade ships sail, warships will inevitably follow. Icebreakers, aircraft, warships, and submarines will play a significant role in securing the Arctic, or at the very least denying full use of it to an adversary. The U.S. Navy, Coast Guard, and even Air Force must ensure freedom of navigation, maintain sea lanes through icebreaking, and guard against potential naval threats. Russia is an Arctic power, China has declared itself to be a “near Arctic power.”³⁷⁰ Currently, resource exploration is still treacherous and international laws like the UNCLOS and environmental concerns both serve to constrain economic activity in the Arctic.³⁷¹ However, as mineral resources fall under increasingly high demand, and international law in increasingly low regard, the incentives to develop the Arctic will grow, and consequently so will the need to safeguard it.

Fourth, climate change must be understood as a threat multiplier and a source of conflict. Droughts, fires, crop failures, flooding, which continue to increase in frequency and magnitude with climate change, as well as rising sea levels are leading to food and water scarcity and rendering whole areas uninhabitable. Already, 21.5 million people have been displaced by climate change, a quarter billion people in developing countries are at risk in coastal areas from rising sea levels, and the IEP estimates 1.2 billion people will be displaced by climate change by 2050.³⁷² While a hypothetical major war with China can be deterred and avoided through diplomacy, there is no avoiding the onslaught of climate change and its risks to U.S. and global security. The Middle East, the Sahel, and South Asia are especially vulnerable to climate-driven instability. Rising water stress in transboundary river basins—such as the Nile, Indus, and

³⁷⁰ Funaiole, Matthew P. et al., “Frozen Frontiers. China’s Great Power Ambitions in the Polar Regions”

³⁷¹ Pechko, Kiel., “Rising Tensions and Shifting Strategies: The Evolving Dynamics of US Grand Strategy in the Arctic”

³⁷² Ida, Tetsuji, “Climate refugees – the world’s forgotten victims ”

Mekong—has already led to geopolitical tensions, increasing the risk of state-backed resource militarization.³⁷³ Similarly, extreme drought conditions, like those that preceded the Syrian Civil War in 2011, have demonstrated how climate shocks can act as a catalyst for conflict, driving mass displacement and exacerbating social unrest.³⁷⁴ Furthermore, the push toward renewable energy technologies has intensified competition over critical minerals such as lithium, cobalt, and rare earth elements (REEs)—materials essential for batteries, solar panels, and wind turbines. China dominates REE processing with 90% of the world’s market while the Democratic Republic of the Congo controls 70% of the world’s cobalt supply, often under conditions linked to corruption and conflict.³⁷⁵ As demand for these materials surges, resource nationalism and strategic competition will escalate. The U.S. military, which both needs critical resources to research and build its tech-heavy weapons systems and has the responsibility of mitigating and managing global security risk, must consider climate change as the existential security issue that it is.

Finally, the role of the military may need to expand to guarantee security not just from armed threats, but from natural threats by building more capacity for Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Response (HA/DR) missions. HA/DR missions are already within the purview of the U.S. and allied militaries.³⁷⁶ Domestically, the response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005 by the National Guard is a well-known example of the U.S. military conducting HA/DR. Helicopters conducted search-and-rescue and quickly delivered personnel and materiel to

³⁷³ International Military Council on Climate and Security, “World Climate and Security Report 2024: Military Innovation and the Climate Challenge”

³⁷⁴ Kelley, Colin P., et al., “Climate Change in the Fertile Crescent and Implications of the Recent Syrian Drought”

³⁷⁵ U.S. Geological Survey., “Mineral Commodity Summaries”

³⁷⁶ NATO Standardization Office, “Allied Joint Doctrine for the Military Contribution to Humanitarian Assistance”

difficult-to-reach locations. Combat engineers cleared airfields and roads, and repaired pumps and levees. Food, water, medicine, and other supplies were flown in and distributed.³⁷⁷ The U.S. military, with its immense logistical might, can be an invaluable asset for HA/DR missions, providing relief at speeds and scales that civilian organizations cannot. As natural disasters become more common due to climate change, a growing security threat unchanged by war or peace, there will be a corresponding increase demand for HA/DR – a demand which the military must be poised to meet.

China's Peer Status

The People's Republic of China surpassed the United States in terms of gross domestic product (GDP), adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP), in 2016.³⁷⁸ The U.S. DOD may get more funding according to the market exchange rate, but the Renminbi buys a lot more goods and services in China than dollars on a forex market. A comparative analysis by the CEPR shows that total Chinese military spending, accounting for official and non-official spending, and accounting for military purchasing power parity, reveals that China is spending about 59% of what the U.S. spends.³⁷⁹ Considering this, the United States military cannot realistically afford to procure and sustain force posture suited to fight and win two wars. Indeed, the notion of a two-war military is unrealistic and moving forward the objective should be a force that is ready to deter and fight one major war. The United States cannot afford to outspend every single adversary in the world. Rather, it must focus on one: the People's Republic of China, whose long-term strategic goal is “national rejuvenation by 2049.” This includes building the People's

³⁷⁷ Berthelot, Roberta, “The Army response to Hurricane Katrina”

³⁷⁸ International Monetary Fund, “World Economic Outlook (October 2024) - GDP Based on PPP, Share of World.”

³⁷⁹ CEPR, “China's Military Rise: Comparative Military Spending in China and the US”

Liberation Army (PLA) into a “world-class military,” on par with the U.S. Beijing’s focus on military modernization and naval expansion aims to directly challenge the U.S. military’s ability to operate in the Pacific. For example, the PLA Rocket Force (PLARF) has fielded a diverse arsenal of precision-strike ballistic, hypersonic, and cruise missiles, including the DF-26 “carrier killer” missile, designed to strike U.S. aircraft carriers operating in the Second Island Chain.³⁸⁰ The DF-21D, a medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM), and the DF-17 hypersonic glide vehicle further enhance China’s anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities, presenting a significant challenge to U.S. naval operations in the region. Meanwhile, the Type 055 destroyer, China’s most advanced surface combatant, enhances the PLA Navy’s (PLAN) air defense, anti-submarine warfare, and command-and-control capabilities. Simultaneously, China’s expanding fleet of Type 095 hunter/killer submarines (SSNs) poses a growing threat to U.S. naval logistics in the Pacific, capable of interdicting trans-Pacific supply routes critical for U.S. power projection.³⁸¹ The PLAN is already the largest navy in the world by fleet size, and at current shipbuilding rates, is projected to operate over 460 combat ships by 2030, compared to the U.S. Navy’s planned 290–300 vessels. China is producing these modern weapons systems at an unprecedented scale with the country’s naval shipbuilding industry outproducing the United States, and every ton of U.S. warship produced is matched or exceeded by the PLAN.³⁸² In short, the PRC is on track to contest for military parity with the U.S. in the not-too-distant future, and a one-war focused force is the only way to remain competitive.

³⁸⁰ Project 2049 Institute, “China’s Evolving Conventional Strategic Strike Capability: The Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile Challenge to U.S. Maritime Operations in the Western Pacific”

³⁸¹ Kirchberger, Sarah, “China’s Submarine Industrial Base: State-Led Innovation with Chinese Characteristics”

³⁸² Congressional Research Service, “China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress”

As the military transitions to a one-war force, the nature of the force itself must change as well. In the post-9/11 military, counter insurgency (COIN) was the doctrine du jour. COIN defined those two decades of operations, marked by two long and costly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Doctrine emphasized small-unit tactics and reliance on air support.³⁸³ Commanders relied on uncontested skies and all-domain primacy over their adversaries.³⁸⁴ However, Russia's 2022 ground invasion of Ukraine has shown that Large Scale Combat Operations (LSCOs) are not vestiges of the past, but current reality. Indeed, any conventional confrontation with China will require a force designed around LSCO. As the U.S. military transitions from focusing on COIN to LSCO, two considerations must be front-of-mind. First, the increased scale and intensity of LSCO will put great strain on the defense industrial base. Already, issues have shown up in the ability of the U.S. and allies to supply Ukraine with basic combat equipment: shells, tanks, howitzers, MANPADs, etc.). In 2024, Russia was estimated to have produced 3 million artillery shells, while Ukraine and its allies struggled to produce just over 1 million, even after two years at war.³⁸⁵ The disparity of ammunition availability has been shaping battlefield outcomes, while the delays in ramping up production in the West have shown the existing vulnerabilities in the U.S. and allied defense industrial bases.³⁸⁶ Thus, both magazine depth, that is the amount of materiel in peacetime reserves, and surge production capacity, that is the wartime rate of production, must be, through U.S. procurement and defense industrial policies, brought up to the requirements of LSCO.³⁸⁷ Furthermore, it is not just the quantity of systems,

³⁸³ Cunningham, James; Windrem, Joseph, "What Happened to the Afghan Air Force?"

³⁸⁴ Bauscher, D.J., "Mass the Fire: Artillery Organization at Echelons Above Brigade"

³⁸⁵ Lillis, Katie B., et al, "Exclusive: Russia producing three times more artillery shells than US and Europe for Ukraine"

³⁸⁶ Jones, Seth G, "Empty Bins in a Wartime Environment: The Challenge to the U.S. Defense Industrial Base"

³⁸⁷ McGinn, J.G.J., and S. Cassidy, "Mobilizing the Defense Industrial Base in the Event of Major Conflict."

but also their capabilities that win wars. One of the foundations of the U.S. military's capabilities has been its worldwide lead in innovative technology. American forces have, for almost the past half century, fought with technologically superior equipment than their adversaries. However, as technology advances and weapons systems become more complex and expensive, maintaining this technological disparity in American favor becomes more difficult, and, as adversaries grow, more necessary. Indeed, while a 40-year-old hand grenade explodes just as loudly and lethally as a brand new one, a 40-year-old F-16 simply cannot contest air superiority with a brand-new F-35 or even a 20-year-old F-22. Researching and developing, as well as procuring and maintaining, the latest platforms and weapons systems is a continuous endeavor. Interruptions lead to human and industrial capital being lost to other sectors. Once lost, it is an extremely expensive and lengthy process to educate the next generation of researchers and engineers, build again labs, factories, and supply chains, and institutional memory, once lost, cannot be recovered, those lessons forgotten having to be relearned. This is not a call for wasteful and unaccountable spending; rather, research and procurement processes and budgets must be isolated from political vicissitudes to achieve their long-term results. Furthermore, next-generation research must increasingly be conducted jointly with allies as technological complexity drives increased costs. For example, the Air Force's Next Generation Air Dominance (NGAD) program is estimated to have a unit cost of \$300 million, which is triple that of the current 5th-gen F-35.³⁸⁸ Sharing the cost of development of these programs, as well as knitting closer links between technological and human capital of the U.S. and its allies, is the way forward for a U.S. military that seeks to maintain its technological edge.

³⁸⁸ Beebe, Evan, "Flying into the Future: An Update on the Air Force's NGAD Program."

Second, LSCO challenges the notion of U.S. military primacy. The U.S. has historically enjoyed uncontested primacy in four out of five domains: air, sea, space, and cyber, with only the land domain being contested. However, in a future LSCO scenario, China will likely challenge U.S. dominance across all domains.³⁸⁹ If U.S. forces lose air superiority, how will a ground force accustomed to calling in precision airstrikes operate effectively? To this end, the U.S. must prioritize fighting and winning when its primacy is contested. Again, the answer to U.S. military security lies with American allies, where strengthening high-interoperability partnerships with powerful allies such as Japan, Australia, and NATO to preserve collective primacy. Another is to enhance asymmetric tactics, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, where the U.S. and its allies face the PLA's formidable anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities.³⁹⁰ One of the most unique aspects of the American military is its global presence, maintained through a worldwide network of bases that has had no real historical equivalent. These bases signal commitment to allies, deter aggression, and when deterrence fails, enable the U.S. to respond rapidly to said aggression. However, shifting geopolitical realities and increasing financial burdens necessitate recalibration. While maintaining key logistics hubs in Europe remains essential for NATO commitments and force sustainment, the Indo-Pacific theater requires a transition to a more agile and survivable basing model.³⁹¹ Indeed, the current basing structure there is vulnerable, especially to the aforementioned growing arsenal of long-range missiles fielded by the PLARF, like the DF-26, which can reach Guam, a central logistics hub for American forces in the region, or the DF-17, which is a difficult target for missile defenses.³⁹² Large bases such as Kadena Air Base (Japan)

³⁸⁹ Alveranga, L.A., "The U.S. Army May Need to Redefine the Elements of Operational Art for Future Warfare"

³⁹⁰ Berger, L.G.J.B., and L.C.J.D. Einhorn, "Lethal Force, Risk, and LSCO"

³⁹¹ Harris, C.D., "An Examination of Indo-Pacific Security Cooperation Activities to Enable EABO as a Deterrent"

³⁹² Mastro, Oriana Skylar, "The Challenges of Deterrence in the Taiwan Strait"

and Andersen Air Force Base (Guam) are high-priority targets in a potential preemptive strike scenario.³⁹³ With aircraft concentrated on these large bases, even a few well-executed attacks could settle the contest for air superiority on the ground before it ever begins in the sky. Furthermore, the U.S. basing network depends heavily on host-nation cooperation, yet political considerations frequently constrain expansion. Past examples include Japan, where domestic opposition limited the ability to reinforce Kadena, while South Korea imposed restrictions on the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system due to diplomatic pressure from China.³⁹⁴ The Philippines, after expelling U.S. forces in 1992, has since renewed limited U.S. access under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), which prohibits permanent U.S. bases.³⁹⁵ In Europe, Germany and Turkey have resisted expanded U.S. deployments.³⁹⁶ Adding to the political and security challenges is cost. Maintaining large, permanent overseas bases exceeds \$24 billion annually, making it an increasingly heavy fiscal burden.³⁹⁷ Hardening these installations against modern missile threats would require billions more in infrastructure investments, further straining resources.³⁹⁸ As the personnel and materiel of the U.S. military shifts from COIN to LSCO preparedness, so too does the imperative fall on installations; U.S. bases abroad need to be more survivable and more cost-effective. To this end, the Air Force's Agile Combat Employment doctrine must be pursued and expanded upon. Not clustering all eggs in one basket (or all F-35s in one hangar), agile basing enhances survivability

³⁹³ Frederick, Bryan, Kristen Gunness, Gina Tarini, and Andrew Stravers, "Improving Conflict-Phase Access: The Role of Allies and Partners in U.S. Military Basing Strategy"

³⁹⁴ Smith, Sheila A., "Shifting Terrain: The Domestic Politics of the U.S. Military Presence in Asia"

³⁹⁵ Yeo, Andrew I., "Security, Sovereignty, and Justice in U.S. Overseas Military Presence"

³⁹⁶ Cooley, Alexander., "Base Politics: Democratic Change and the U.S. Military Overseas"

³⁹⁷ Priebe, Miranda, Kristen Gunness, Karl Mueller, and Zachary Burdette, "The Limits of Restraint: The Military Implications of U.S. Grand Strategy in the Indo-Pacific"

³⁹⁸ Mastro, Oriana Skylar, "Defense, Deterrence, and the Role of Guam"

by dispersing assets across a network of smaller, harder-to-target locations. One key consideration will be the increased demand for logistics; both sealift and airlift capacity must be increased to compensate for the efficiencies lost by moving to a greater number of smaller bases. The Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI) has allocated 9.9 billion toward these efforts, including spending on missile defenses, increased logistical capabilities, and prepositioning key materiel.³⁹⁹ The Marine Corps' Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO) doctrine envisions small, mobile units operating from austere island outposts, while the Air Force's ACE strategy enables rapid aircraft dispersal across multiple airfields.⁴⁰⁰ These adaptations deny adversaries a decisive first-strike advantage and improve U.S. force resilience in a potential Indo-Pacific conflict. Fiscally, agile basing reduces long-term costs by minimizing the need for permanently manned installations. Instead, investments must focus on austere forward operating sites, rotational deployments, and mobile logistics hubs, ensuring a resilient force posture in contested environments. This approach aligns with fiscal realities and the current and expected threat environment while preserving U.S. force projection capabilities and deterrence. Finally, integrated planning must account for logistics in a contested environment. Both sealift and airlift capacities, as well as prepositioned materiel, remain critical for sustained operations as more numerous, more agile, and smaller bases lose logistical efficiency compared to large permanent bases in exchange for their enhanced survivability.

21st Century Warfare

War is shaped by the technology employed in its conduct. In the 20th century, such advances as internal combustion, automatic weapons, jet aircraft, electronics, and nuclear

³⁹⁹ Department of Defense, "Pacific Defense Initiative"

⁴⁰⁰ Harris, C.D. "An Examination of Indo-Pacific Security Cooperation Activities to Enable EABO as a Deterrent"

weapons changed the nature of warfare at breakneck speed. Today, as we conclude the first quarter of the 21st century, the battlespace has expanded into outer space and cyber space.

Nuclear weapons have proliferated. We are opening a second Pandora's box with the advent of artificial intelligence. The military must consider the impact of AI on warfare, the rise of cyber and hybrid warfare, and the risk of limited nuclear conflicts and potential escalation.

First, AI has tremendous potential to change all aspects of warfare. At home, it can make defense production lines more efficient. On the battlefield, AI can take in and process data faster and more accurately than any human could. A large part of warfare is simply finding the enemy. Artificial sensors have largely replaced the Mk1 Eyeball, and now data from multiple sensors is combined in a process called sensor fusion.⁴⁰¹ AI enables sensor fusion to deliver fast and accurate results, even in cases of conflicting information, such as would occur from enemy jamming.⁴⁰² Russia's invasion of Ukraine has ushered in widespread use of small, disposable drones to guide artillery or even act as kamikazes, providing lots of capabilities at very little cost, shaping the battlefield of tomorrow.⁴⁰³ Less well-known is the impact AI will have on nuclear deterrence. With around 2/3rds of the planet's surface to hide in, nuclear ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) provide the backbone of most countries' nuclear deterrents. They can remain undetected until required to launch, from anywhere in the world. However, with oceans set to become increasingly transparent as both sensor and processing technology evolve, and with the probability of being able to detect and track SSBNs increasing, the U.S. nuclear

⁴⁰¹ Perez, Dominic, "CJADC2 Interoperability: AI-/ML-Based Sensor Fusion at the Edge - Military Embedded Systems"

⁴⁰² DeLisle, Jean-Jaques, "Modern Jamming: Drones, Quantum, and AI"

⁴⁰³ Hyun-Ho, H, "The Rise of Drone Swarms: Military Applications, Countermeasures, and Strategic Implications"

deterrent is at risk of becoming more fragile.⁴⁰⁴ What other fundamental assumptions about warfare, such as that SSBNs are nigh impossible to locate, will AI challenge? Here the issue of autonomous weapons arises. Putting aside the great moral question of whether a computer should be empowered to decide to take a human life, autonomous weapons prove challenging in the face of tactics devised to fight humans, which often use fires to impart fear, chaos, panic, etc. on an enemy unit, degrading its ability to function. Autonomous weapons do not feel anything and therefore tactics must be re-evaluated. Furthermore, since AI is faster at processing than humans are, its involvement in decision chains can lead it to act faster than a human being is able to monitor or correct it, potentially leading to unintentional escalation.⁴⁰⁵ The case of Soviet officer Stanislav Petrov overriding the warning on his missile-defense radar that erroneously indicated a U.S. nuclear strike comes to mind. The U.S. military must ensure that the decision to escalate is always made by a human, and that AI adoption occurs within strong guardrails of human oversight.

Second, the issue of hybrid warfare is of great concern, as it would allow adversaries to achieve political ends using means that are right below the threshold for U.S. military intervention. For example, in the South China Sea, China has effectively redrawn maritime boundaries through coercion and artificial island construction.⁴⁰⁶ The People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM) operates under civilian cover, enabling China to harass foreign vessels and enforce maritime claims without the retaliation that would be incurred had they been

⁴⁰⁴ Bradbury, Roger, et al., "Transparent Oceans? The Coming SSBN Counter-Detection Task May Be Insuperable"

⁴⁰⁵ Zarrar, H., and S. A. Kakar., "Generative Artificial Intelligence & Its Military Applications by the U.S. and China—Lessons for South Asia"

⁴⁰⁶ Nicchiarelli, Patrick, "Maritime Grey Zone Operations in the South China Sea: Assessing China's Naval Strategy and Its Impact on Regional Security and Stability"

PLAN warships.⁴⁰⁷ Hybrid warfare allows states to master the art of war, which Sun Tzu writes is “to subdue the enemy without fighting.”⁴⁰⁸ Cyberwarfare is an integral part of hybrid operations, with the PRC engaging in persistent cyber espionage, notably against key U.S. targets. The hacking of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) in 2015, for example, compromised the personal records of over 21 million government employees, demonstrating both Beijing’s cyber capabilities and intentions.⁴⁰⁹ Meanwhile, the quintessential hybrid warrior in Europe is Russia. It has hybrid tactics to undermine Western democracies and project power. It used heavy cyberattacks against Estonia in 2007. In 2014, its annexation of Crimea relied on a combination of disinformation, cyberattacks, and the deployment of unmarked “little green men” to seize key infrastructure while maintaining plausible deniability. When launching its invasion of Ukraine on February 2022, Russia supplemented its conventional offensive with cyberattacks, for example targeting the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense with a DDOS attack.⁴¹⁰ A more unknown consideration is that, just as warfare has expanded into cyberspace, it will likely expand into outer space. Indeed, the United States, along with Russia and China, have developed and tested anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons capable of disabling or destroying satellites while in orbit.⁴¹¹ Such weapons have yet to be used in anger, so planning a strategy to respond to them is still a theoretical endeavor which presents some key challenges, including the obvious considerations that satellites are both unmanned and in orbit. Hybrid warfare seeks to achieve

⁴⁰⁷ Jash, Amrita, “Fight and Win Without Waging a War: How China Fights Hybrid Warfare”

⁴⁰⁸ Tzu, Sun, “The Art of War”

⁴⁰⁹ Patalano, Alessio, “When Strategy is ‘Hybrid’ and Not ‘Grey’: Reviewing Chinese Military and Constabulary Coercion at Sea”

⁴¹⁰ Lee, S. H., and S. Hoon Lee, “Developing Cyber Warfare of South Korea through Russia’s Hybrid Warfare Case”

⁴¹¹ Sutil Toledano, J., “The Use of Hybrid Warfare to Achieve Strategic Objectives: Comparing Russian and Chinese Approaches”

strategic gains by exploiting gaps in an adversary's deterrent force. If their conventional force is too strong, war can be waged through other domains where the adversary may be less prepared or capable, such as through cyberspace. The U.S. military must have prepared responses to deter hybrid operations by adversaries, especially keeping in mind escalation management.

Finally, the atomic threat, which in 1991 seemed to fade away, is back once again. At the time of writing, it is 89 seconds to midnight, the closest it's ever been.⁴¹² The risk of limited nuclear war has resurfaced as a critical challenge for U.S. grand strategy, as adversaries are filling gaps on the international bargaining table left by their conventional forces with nuclear forces, as Russia has been doing during its invasion of Ukraine as the former sought to deter Western military aid to the latter. Indeed, Russian military doctrine increasingly incorporates the use of tactical nuclear weapons as part of its "escalate to de-escalate" strategy, wherein Moscow may consider a limited nuclear strike to deter NATO intervention or to force Ukraine into submission.⁴¹³ Given these developments, the United States must adapt its deterrence posture to mitigate the risks of nuclear escalation while ensuring strategic stability and not inadvertently incentivizing "escalate to de-escalate" strategies. The most likely threat comes from a low-yield nuclear strike, which, for example, Moscow might use against a military target in Ukraine if faced with imminent battlefield defeat or domestic instability.⁴¹⁴ While the actual likelihood of nuclear use remains uncertain, for example with Russia setting multiple red lines during its invasion of Ukraine and not following through with its threats once crossed, the very existence of these threats shapes the U.S. and NATO's strategic calculus. To counter these risks, a multi-

⁴¹² Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, "2025 Doomsday Clock Announcement"

⁴¹³ Floudas, Demetrius, "Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Atomic Warfare but Were Afraid to Ask: Nuclear Strategy in the Ukraine War Era"

⁴¹⁴ RAND, "Understanding the Risk of Escalation in the War in Ukraine"

pronged approach which uses nuclear, conventional, cyber, and diplomatic tools should be employed to shape adversary decision-making. The deployment of low-yield nuclear warheads on SLBMs, for example, is one aspect of this approach, giving commanders more flexible nuclear options to deter adversaries without immediately escalating to high-yield strategic nuclear use.⁴¹⁵ However, deterrence alone is insufficient. If Russia were to use a tactical nuclear weapon, the dilemma faced by the U.S. would be extremely difficult to answer whether to respond with nuclear force, escalate conventionally, or pursue diplomatic containment. The issue comes with the unprecedented nature, sheer complexity, and existential stakes of limited nuclear-use scenarios, where both one's adversary's moves and one's own moves are both unforeseeable.⁴¹⁶ With uncontrolled escalation the worst fear of all sides in even a limited nuclear exchange, robust crisis management mechanisms, such as hotlines and strategic stability talks, are critical to preventing catastrophic miscalculation.

⁴¹⁵ Woolf, Amy F. 2023, "U.S. Nuclear Policy: Tactical Nuclear Weapons and Strategic Deterrence"

⁴¹⁶ Stein, Janice G, "Escalation Management in Ukraine: Assessing the U.S. Response to Russia's Manipulation of Risk"

21st Century Military Policy Options

I. Doctrinal changes

a. **One-war military that is focused on countering, deterring, and winning a conventional fight against the PRC and its allies, and “delegating” deterring against Russia, on land and air, against European NATO allies, but leading in deterrence at sea, especially in the Arctic. HA/DR as a core mission, both at home and abroad.**

i. **Military doctrine is the conceptual understanding of how exactly military force ought to be applied. Russian doctrine emphasizes operational-level flexibility and massed fires. U.S. doctrine emphasizes full-spectrum dominance (primacy in all domains of warfare). Doctrinal changes can serve to adapt a military to a changing environment by eliminating outdated concepts for more current understandings. Doctrine of full-spectrum dominance (primacy) may not be viable in twenty years, and thus a new doctrine may need to be devised that reflects a reality where U.S. military primacy may be impossible to achieve.**

II. Technological and industrial policies

a. **R&D funding can be allocated for developing alternative aviation fuels, and procurement funding can be allocated to stockpile large amounts of munitions.**

b. **Collaboration with the private and civil sector. Companies can be incentivized outside of U.S. defense spending to pursue valuable technologies, develop production capacity, shorten or onshore supply chains, etc.**

Securing the Future Through International Cooperation

It is a core expectation that people should live without fear and have access to essentials that will sustain their well-being. As home to over 340 million people and being the global power that it is, the United States must be prepared to engage in both domestic and national security at all times. How the United States chooses to engage, whether with their own citizens, their allies, or their perceived adversaries or competitors, will shape the results of critical issues, such as approaches to diplomatic solutions, resolving global conflicts, and general stability. Engagement is critical for security. As a global leader, the United States cannot disengage with the rest of the world without risking its own security. However, the U.S. has long been carrying much of the burden as the global leader. As the world's dynamics are currently shifting, where nations are rapidly catching up, the U.S. can use this moment in time to strengthen itself and its relations, while working to weaken any threats to national and international security.

As the U.S. engages with allies or adversaries at the international level, it needs to address the impact of its errors within the international community. As an international leader for many years, other nations have often looked up to the U.S., sought their support, or offered theirs. As the U.S. continues to engage with the world for the remainder of this century, an emphasis must be placed on taking more responsibility when it also comes to addressing its flaws. When it comes to engagement, the security of the U.S. and that of the international community rests on the ideas of trust, respect, and commitment. As mistakes have been made in the past, and will continue to be made moving forward, the U.S. needs to take this on as part of the leadership role, taking responsibility. Changes will not be made if mistakes are hidden. They are inevitable, but ways in which the U.S. and the rest of the world choose to move past them will dictate the state of security for the current and coming generations. If the U.S. plans to share

burdens and help others rise up, then it needs to show that it can grow and learn from its own mistakes.

Perhaps the strongest military alliance the United States engages with, as of current day, is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It was founded in 1949, with the U.S. being one of the first and most prominent members,⁴¹⁷ and since then has played an active role in the alliance. However, in the past couple of years as a result of Russia's invasion into Ukraine, the role of the United States in NATO has been debated amongst many including members of the alliance, scholars, and everyday citizens.

NATO provides significant benefits to all its member states, including the United States. Article 4 of the Treaty states that "parties shall consult together whenever... security of any of the Parties is threatened,"⁴¹⁸ reinforcing collective dialogue in times of a crisis. Article 5 declares that "an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all."⁴¹⁹ The collective defense of those who engage in the alliance is meant to uphold the security of all participating nations. Certainly, this is a great benefit.

However, since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, questions have arisen regarding the levels of engagement to which the U.S. partakes in regarding NATO. There are two core arguments expressed about U.S. involvement, the first being that Russia should be the bigger priority, and that in order "to bolster deterrence and prevent further Russian aggressions... the United States should continue to play an active role in Europe."⁴²⁰ The second argument shifts

⁴¹⁷ Masters, Jonathan. "What Is NATO?"

⁴¹⁸ North Atlantic Treaty

⁴¹⁹ North Atlantic Treaty

⁴²⁰ Kroenig, Matthew, et al. "U.S. Lessons from Russia's War on Ukraine."

the focus from Russia to China, believing that there is a “growing need for the United States to turn its attention to the long-term challenges posed by China.”⁴²¹ These challenges would include issues like cybersecurity, or the Indo-Pacific region.

When it comes to engagement in Europe, the U.S.’s grand strategy must prioritize not only its NATO alliance, but how the alliance affects issues at home. First, engagement with NATO comes at a great monetary cost. As part of the alliance, it was a requirement that members allocate “2 percent of their annual gross domestic product (GDP) on defense by 2024.”⁴²² However, as of 2023, only eleven out of the thirty members at the time met this condition. In addition, “NATO members were estimated to have collectively spent more than \$1 trillion on defense in 2023 alone. The United States accounted for roughly 70 percent of this.”⁴²³

With the amount of money, troops, and aid the U.S. has sent to Ukraine through this war, “the United States has demonstrated its indispensability to European security and confirmed Europe’s dependence on Washington. European leaders have seemingly accepted this as the natural state of affairs.”⁴²⁴ President Trump has often threatened to pull out of NATO on account of the other members not contributing enough to defensive measures. Yet, even if “European states spend all 3 percent of their GDP on defense [...] it is still doubtful European nations would be able to defend Europe. The problem is that European militaries are not set up to fight without the United States.”⁴²⁵

⁴²¹ Kroenig, Matthew, et al. “U.S. Lessons from Russia’s War on Ukraine.”

⁴²² Masters, Jonathan. “What Is NATO?”

⁴²³ Masters, Jonathan. “What Is NATO?”

⁴²⁴ Bergmann, Max, et al. “Why European Defense Still Depends on America.”

⁴²⁵ Bergmann, Max. “The United States Now Wants European Strategic Autonomy.”

It would not be for the benefit of the U.S. to leave NATO. As addressed further in this section, NATO is a strong outlet for the U.S. to bring and work upon other pressing issues on an international scale. Yet, structural changes must be made, as it can be seen that Europe's over-reliance on American funding, troops, and military resources has placed a disproportionate burden on the United States. The U.S. cannot continue to take on the role of Europe's protector. As global dynamics shift, the U.S. must balance its NATO commitments with emerging priorities, such as relations with China. Rather than act as Europe's fail-safe, the U.S. needs to find ways to encourage NATO allies to take greater share of responsibility while continuing as an active member of the alliance.

With the Russia-Ukraine war in its backyard, Europe is beginning to reach similar realizations themselves. In 2021, German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer noted that "the truth is that a good life in Germany and Europe depends more and more on how we ensure our security ourselves."⁴²⁶ The U.S. should continue to foster these thoughts, as European allies should collaborate and organize together to fill the gaps that are dependent on the U.S. This would ultimately strengthen European security while reducing the burden and responsibility of the U.S., allowing the nation to focus on more pressing issues at its own front door.

This further brings attention to the fact that the U.S. needs to find the right balance, to both continue interacting with the alliance but also pushing for other members to step up to have a greater role. This balance is highly important, as the U.S. cannot show that their commitment to NATO is no longer important. NATO needs the U.S., and the U.S. needs NATO. It was the U.S. commitment to NATO which helped deter a Soviet invasion in the past.⁴²⁷ If U.S. commitment is

⁴²⁶ Schnauffer, Tad A. "The US-NATO Relationship: The Cost of Maintaining Political Pressure on Allies."

⁴²⁷ Schnauffer, Tad A. "The US-NATO Relationship: The Cost of Maintaining Political Pressure on Allies."

questioned, then it is likely that states like Russia will test the alliance.⁴²⁸ If the strength of the alliance is questioned by nonmembers and adversaries, the impact of the alliance falters. After all, “deterrence works best when allies clearly express their mutual obligations to all actors on the international stage.”⁴²⁹ The U.S. must find a balance between pushing NATO members to contribute more, but also showing that it can remain a strong, secure partner. After all, history reflects the power of a great alliance, such as past threats of Soviet invasion and with a great alliance, the U.S. can continue to use it to take steps to secure other aspects of the nation with growing modern problems, like cybersecurity.

Cybersecurity has been a growing concern in the last couple years, with an emphasis on the rising tensions over issues such as data privacy, election security, etc. most of which ultimately tie back to China. Recent U.S. actions, including regulations on the popular social media app, TikTok, reflect these growing concerns over digital security and foreign influence. There are a few factors which may determine cyberspace stability, including “overall state security environment, the possibility of conflict between countries in cyberspace, the existence of an institution consisting of the rule of law, common international norms of conduct, and a certain degree of consensus among major powers to maintain stability.”⁴³⁰ Cyberspace encompasses multitudes of information, services, communications, etc., and the sheer vastness of cyberspace points to the need for U.S. engagement with the international community regarding this factor.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, cybercrime skyrocketed all across the globe. For example, an advanced persistent threat (APT) called “Vicious Panda” exploited coronavirus fears

⁴²⁸ Schnauffer, Tad A. “The US-NATO Relationship: The Cost of Maintaining Political Pressure on Allies.”

⁴²⁹ Schnauffer, Tad A. “The US-NATO Relationship: The Cost of Maintaining Political Pressure on Allies.”

⁴³⁰ Manqing, Cheng. “Topic: International Relations in Digitalization: How Cyberspace Changes Geopolitical Game Between Big Powers.”

to attack the Mongolian public sectors, using a remote access trojan (RAT) allowing distant users to control computers in Mongolia without the user's knowledge.⁴³¹ In addition, a second APT nicknamed "Mustang Panda" was believed to have "used malware-infected Microsoft Word documents relating to COVID-19 to target Vietnamese, Taiwanese, and Filipino entities."⁴³² Both of these APTs originated from China.

In the 21st century, the increase of cybercrime is present at an international scale. Russia has targeted Ukraine's public and private sectors to divert and censor Ukrainian citizens' access to the internet, manipulating information.⁴³³ The Democratic People's Republic of North Korea dispatches thousands of IT workers to generate fraudulent revenue to fund its weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs, while evading sanctions through cybercrime and cryptocurrency theft.⁴³⁴ China has the ability to cyberattack critical infrastructure not limited to, but including oil and gas pipelines and rail systems of the U.S. and their allies.⁴³⁵

Cybercrimes are not something that can be restrained by borders, by typical means of punishment like sanctions, or by worldwide issues like Covid. Cybersecurity is an international issue, and for its own security, the U.S. needs to engage at an international level to address it. By engaging with the issue internationally, the U.S. can garner support, possibly establish more groups dedicated to enhanced research, policy making and enforcement methods, and security practices concerning cyberspace protection for all individuals. In addition, there are possibilities that it can increase pressure on countries and individuals that may use cyberspace to commit

⁴³¹ Mahadeven, Prem. "Cybercrime: Threats during the COVID-19 pandemic."

⁴³² Mahadeven, Prem. "Cybercrime: Threats during the COVID-19 pandemic."

⁴³³ "United States International Cyberspace and Digital Policy Strategy"

⁴³⁴ "United States International Cyberspace and Digital Policy Strategy"

⁴³⁵ "United States International Cyberspace and Digital Policy Strategy"

crimes if international legislations and repercussions are legalized, heavily regulated, and enforced.

International cooperation regarding cyberspace has been shown to be effective. In the EU, “international cooperation and mutual assistance can reflect efforts to establish a common digital market and ensure the free flow of data... the European Union has successively promulgated the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which unifies the cross-border rules system for personal data in more than 20 European Union member countries.”⁴³⁶ With the GDPR, the EU has provided individuals with enforceable rights to their personal data.⁴³⁷ In addition, data protection authorities can issue fines, warnings, bans, and other measures to those in charge of handling all this data and fail to protect the rights of the individual.⁴³⁸ The EU has also chosen to start taking data protection more naturally by partnering with Japan and creating the “largest area of safe and free data flows in the world, allowing personal data to flow freely between the two economies on the basis of strong protection guarantees.”⁴³⁹

Cyberspace is far too large for the U.S. to protect and regulate itself. If the EU and Japan could work together, the U.S. already has a powerful alliance they could use as well. While the other members of NATO must share a bigger part of the defensive burden, the U.S. can begin expanding the use of NATO and its resources. Instead of NATO being primarily a defensive alliance through military, the U.S. can take steps to help NATO grow into an alliance that addresses and defends from an array of problems of concerns like cybersecurity. If cyberspace is

⁴³⁶ Ye Zhu, et al. “Topic: Chinese Cyber Security Legislation Based on Cyberspace Sovereignty.”

⁴³⁷ “GDPR – the fabric of a success story”

⁴³⁸ “GDPR – the fabric of a success story”

⁴³⁹ “GDPR – the fabric of a success story”

too vast for the U.S. to handle alone, why not take advantage of relations already set with problems shared, and fight against it.

NATO has taken some steps, as in 2024, they held the first annual Cyber Defense Conference in Berlin. However, the conference came with its set of issues after it was agreed that a NATO Integrated Cyber Centre was to be established. “Indications are that it will be relatively narrow in scope, with a focus on shared situational awareness... ultimately needs a mechanism for planning and implementing cyber operational collaboration among the alliance members and with the private sector... a NATO cyber defense context involves adapting them to the alliance’s multinational framework and diverse member states.”⁴⁴⁰

NATO as a whole, needs to establish priorities that look more ahead to future issues. Information spread through internet usage will only continue to grow, and if changes are not made to start addressing and adapting to the issue now, it will likely reach a point that becomes nearly impossible to handle.

China is an especially serious concern when it comes to U.S. cybersecurity, but it is unlikely that engagement with China regarding cyberspace in particular will be addressed any time in the near future. According to FBI Director Christopher Wray, “the great long-term threat to our nation’s information and intellectual property, and to our economic vitality, is the counterintelligence and economic espionage threat from China” for the reasons of “CCP’s aspirations to wealth and power,”⁴⁴¹ and “to prevent the United States from being able to get in the way of a potential future crisis between China and Taiwan by 2027.”⁴⁴² If engagement with

⁴⁴⁰ Spaulding, Suzanne, et al. “NATO and Cyber: Outrunning the Bear.”

⁴⁴¹ “The China Threat”

⁴⁴² “Chinese Government Poses ‘Broad and Unrelenting’ Threat to U.S. Critical Infrastructure, FBI Director Says.”

China on cyberspace is unforeseeable in the near future, and the U.S. considers it to be a major security issue, then engaging quickly with others like NATO seems to be the best option.

Besides cybersecurity, China remains a concern for other aspects of security and engagement as well. Since the Ukraine war, China “has not only repeated Russian propaganda patterns regarding the war in Ukraine in many cases but also continues to help Russia maintain its industry.”⁴⁴³ While the relationship between China and Russia has proven to not have overcome their historic mistrust,⁴⁴⁴ their relationship resembles a “nonbinding alignment based on shared opposition to what they describe as the U.S. – led international order. This common opposition has spurred cooperation between the two countries.”⁴⁴⁵

Concerns with a bigger Russia-China relationship can lead to many issues. Experts emphasize that “it is China’s assistance that allows Russia to continue its aggression in Ukraine... a joint Chinese-Russian pole is attractive to countries such as Turkey, South Africa, Brazil, regimes in the Middle East and other states of the global south that believe that the current international order does not sufficiently take their voices into account [...] this is evidence by growing popularity of BRICS.”⁴⁴⁶ While BRICS is not currently seen by the U.S. and much of the West as a geopolitical concern, many policymakers have cautioned that it is the growing anti-West sentiment that poses concerns.⁴⁴⁷ Such sentiments often go against typical American views of freedom and if the U.S. grand strategy is meant to help the U.S. become a better leader, the U.S. needs to be prepared for such sentiments.

⁴⁴³ “World: The US, China, and Russia in 2025: A ‘strategic triangle’ with sharp corners.”

⁴⁴⁴ Barrios, Ricardo, et al. “China-Russia Relations”

⁴⁴⁵ Barrios, Ricardo, et al. “China-Russia Relations”

⁴⁴⁶ “World: The US, China, and Russia in 2025: A ‘strategic triangle’ with sharp corners.”

⁴⁴⁷ Ferragamo, Mariel. “What Is the BRICS Group and Why Is It Expanding?”

The key question remains: How should the U.S. engage with these nations? Should engagement be broad, or should it focus primarily with China and possibly Russia, with the expectation that agreements between these major powers will influence other nations such as those of BRICS? How can the U.S. ensure that China's expanding influence does not hinder U.S. security?

The U.S. must develop diplomatic strategies to manage this relationship effectively. The U.S. must acknowledge that China challenges a U.S. – led international order. Engagement will not be easy but there are strategic approaches to navigate all of these complex relationships.

First, if a growing China-Russia relation is worrisome, especially with the possibility that it can hinder U.S. national security through their own organizations like BRICS, there should be an emphasis on engaging the weaknesses of this relation. Brookings Institute experts talk about how concerning Russia's war in Ukraine, the U.S. ought to "keep the channels of communication open and send a clear signal to China that it is in its immediate interest to limit its support for Russia. Since Beijing shares an interest in regional and global stability and would like China to remain a respected member of the international community, China should feel that there is a positive side to reducing its aid to Russia."⁴⁴⁸ As the U.S. engages with China, they cannot come at it with strong U.S. values. This is by no means to say U.S. values should be given up, but engaging with China means finding ways to engage in which they will not feel as though they are being pushed aside and supporting U.S. ideas and values. Things might change for either side way down the line, but for the near future, engaging with China concerning engagement with other nations needs to promote benefits for their cooperation.

⁴⁴⁸ "World: The US, China, and Russia in 2025: A 'strategic triangle' with sharp corners."

In addition, this focus and engagement with China would become much easier if the U.S. does manage to get their NATO allies to boost their defense and take on more responsibility. The war in Ukraine has shown that Russia is not as strong military wise as was believed by many. This is made evident with China choosing to assist them to the point that “Russia becomes increasingly dependent on China.”⁴⁴⁹ Russia themselves has shown failures of intelligence and planning, that they have a military struggling to adapt to the battlefield, their forces lack manpower, and that overall, their military power lags heavily behind the U.S.⁴⁵⁰

Russia has shown that they may be weaker than was previously thought. If the U.S. can uphold NATO to take on more and delegate Russia to them, it will allow the U.S. to focus on China and the competition and security concerns they bring alongside them.

Similar things can be said when engaging China in the Indo-Pacific region, like particularly with Taiwan, a highly contentious problem. The U.S. has chosen to support Taiwan and the general Indo-Pacific region for various reasons. Typical American ideologies like wanting them to have democratic institutions, or a free press, wanting to extend U.S. presence to strengthen alliances in another region of the world, for economic reasons such as trade, and to work on international issues such as terrorism, cybersecurity, and other extreme violence.⁴⁵¹

Interestingly enough, “most countries see their national interests as being best served by engaging positively and proactively with both Washington and Beijing.”⁴⁵² For this reason, most “countries in the Indo-Pacific do not want to choose sides between the United States and China, and there is general anxiety that the current situation between the United States and China may

⁴⁴⁹ “World: The US, China, and Russia in 2025: A ‘strategic triangle’ with sharp corners.”

⁴⁵⁰ Goldstein, Lyle J. “Threat Inflation, Russian Military Weakness, and the Resulting Nuclear Paradox...,”

⁴⁵¹ Hornung, Jeffrey W. “The United States: A Comprehensive Strategy with Challenges Ahead”

⁴⁵² Hornung, Jeffrey W. “The United States: A Comprehensive Strategy with Challenges Ahead”

spiral into confrontation.”⁴⁵³ As previously mentioned in the economic section of the report, nations like Taiwan in the Indo-Pacific region are heavily important for the U.S. for economic purposes, especially concerning trade of natural resources or advanced technologies. With China’s growing relationship with Russia, the U.S. can play on their mistrust and the weaknesses in the relationship. Yet, if many Indo-Pacific countries are stuck between the two major powers, how should the U.S. go about engaging with China here?

If the U.S. chooses to engage with Taiwan, they face “the possible reality of an opponent with both local conventional force advantages and a nuclear escalation threat in the event of a conflict over Taiwan.”⁴⁵⁴ Just like cybersecurity, Taiwan seems to be a very unlikely issue that the U.S. and China will find themselves agreeing on or working on together anytime in the near future.

As with Russia, to engage China in its relationship with Taiwan and the region, the U.S. needs to play on the idea of China wanting to be respected as a global power and showing China that steering away from Taiwan and the region, especially with the use of tactics that may threaten national and international security, is in the best of their interests.

One view that experts have held on while engaging with China in this part of the world is using a form of deterrence strategy. The nuclear issue is one of the biggest security concerns when it comes to engaging with Taiwan, and it’s possible “China’s perception of an asymmetry of stakes and its capability to threaten the U.S. homeland with devastating strikes may allow it, even encourage it, to engage in coercive escalation threats against the United States and its allies, if necessary to succeed.”⁴⁵⁵ The nuclear issue has been one of the biggest security concerns ever

⁴⁵³ Hornung, Jeffrey W. “The United States: A Comprehensive Strategy with Challenges Ahead”

⁴⁵⁴ Payne, Keith B., et al. “Deterring China in the Taiwan Strait.”

⁴⁵⁵ Payne, Keith B., et al. “Deterring China in the Taiwan Strait.”

since before the war in Ukraine started, and to keep the nation and its people secure, the U.S. must act against it. Russia has often threatened nuclear war, but China is likely to use it without much of a warning.

The U.S. needs to demonstrate that they, along with their partners, can withstand tactics adversaries can try to threaten security. A strategy should not imply U.S. dominance or superiority, as it has been seen this is one of the factors in China having started so-called alliances with other nations. Rather, the U.S. strategy for engaging with China, Taiwan, and the Indo-Pacific region is to deny “the CCP of any confidence in a regional *fait accompli*, i.e. deny the expectation of a quick local military victory, and any confidence that threats of escalation, including limited nuclear escalation, will provide the solution to the prospect of a local victory denied.”⁴⁵⁶

Part of the U.S. strategy when engaging with other nations needs to recognize that not everything falls upon the U.S., and not everything will be decided by the U.S. For China, “Beijing ultimately determines the adequacy of U.S. and allied deterrent threats, not Washington.”⁴⁵⁷ If the U.S. chooses to follow a deterrence strategy, it cannot only think about it from an American point of view. Are the strategies and policies enough that China or another nation would actually be deterred or give their actions a second thought? Or are the strategies and policies the U.S. implements assuming that what they do will automatically work simply because they are the U.S.?

In addition, once more, the U.S. cannot bear this burden alone. Just like the U.S. needs to encourage NATO to take on a bigger role, the U.S. should do the same with organizations like

⁴⁵⁶ Payne, Keith B., et al. “Deterring China in the Taiwan Strait.”

⁴⁵⁷ Payne, Keith B., et al. “Deterring China in the Taiwan Strait.”

the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Global threats and security concerns must be worked upon together globally, no longer can the U.S. afford to carry all the burden. Some ASEAN members like Cambodia or Myanmar are too close to China to join in a statement opposing use of force,⁴⁵⁸ and as seen early many of the rest of the Indo-Pacific nations are fearful for their security to choose between two sides. Yet, the ASEAN Declaration calls for peace and stability through law, and on its own, may not deter from aggressive methods used against nations like Taiwan, but something like the possibility of having an “open discussion opposing the use of force to settle disputes, perhaps led by Vietnam, may indirectly add more uncertainty to China’s assessments of the cost of attacking Taiwan,”⁴⁵⁹

The U.S. can support ASEAN in endeavors to deter China. Encouraging them to take a bigger role, a bigger stance, is likely to make China think twice if they are up against the U.S., NATO, and ASEAN. Engagement with China will be difficult from the U.S. perspective, yet this engagement is necessary for the security of interest like trade, values, and other assets.

Concerning the Middle East, perhaps one of the biggest issues deals with oil security. This grand strategy argues for the U.S. leaving oil behind and moving into using renewable energy. Oil is certainly a major player, but the U.S. has also inserted itself into many issues, such as the way it responded to the Arab uprisings, civil war in Yemen with Saudi intervention.⁴⁶⁰ These issues have shown how dynamics have shifted and the U.S. insertion into the Middle East has become increasingly unsuccessful. Unsurprisingly, Chinese influence is growing in the Middle East as well. Therefore, how should the U.S. engage with the Middle East as a transition

⁴⁵⁸ Payne, Keith B., et al. “Deterring China in the Taiwan Strait.”

⁴⁵⁹ Payne, Keith B., et al. “Deterring China in the Taiwan Strait.”

⁴⁶⁰ Croft, Helima (Presider), et al. “Oil and National Security: U.S.- Middle East Relations.”

from oil to other energies take place? And how will the U.S. choose to focus on the relationships they have established here already or possible growing ones, such as China and Saudi-Arabia?

In the Middle East, the U.S. needs to focus on engaging with nations thereby improving adaptability, especially against China in competition. The U.S. and China both share interests in energy resources and the freedom of navigation here, but China has also looked at U.S. intervention here and has seen nothing but strategic error one after another for the last thirty years.⁴⁶¹ To secure the U.S. relationship in the Middle East and the ability to move securely away from oil, the U.S. must take precaution against continuous strategic errors, which would allow for China to be seen as a better partner.

The biggest player in the Middle East that the U.S. could engage with is Saudi Arabia. Though they have mentioned they will not give up their relationship with China, there are ways to keep China at an arm's length.⁴⁶² China offers the Middle East technology that the U.S. does not, and China does not lecture the Middle East about their governments, which pleases them.⁴⁶³

If the U.S. wants to move away from oil but keep good relations with the Middle East, Saudi Arabia is the key player. After all, if one looks at the “grand scheme of things the Middle East are not huge emitters of greenhouse gases... But there is an adaptability issue, and that's where the United States can be – can be helpful.”⁴⁶⁴ Although this argument implies that adaptability is a bigger issue than collaboration on energy transition, the U.S. could mix both, like finding ways to help encourage adaptability to huge issues that the Middle East faces, like water scarcity. Saudi Arabia likes to invest, and if the U.S. found policies to engage with other

⁴⁶¹ Croft, Helima (Presider), et al. “Oil and National Security: U.S.- Middle East Relations.”

⁴⁶² Croft, Helima (Presider), et al. “Oil and National Security: U.S.- Middle East Relations.”

⁴⁶³ Croft, Helima (Presider), et al. “Oil and National Security: U.S.- Middle East Relations.”

⁴⁶⁴ Croft, Helima (Presider), et al. “Oil and National Security: U.S.- Middle East Relations.”

issues affecting the Middle East, they could then use these investments to help fund security for better energy resources. In addition, this could bring less room for China to engage as the competitor.

If democratic values remain a wish of the U.S. to instill and secure into the Middle East, helping them out with their adaptability issues will likely increase their willingness to listen as well. With the Middle East as well, the U.S. cannot engage with hardcore tactics and must be mindful of the current differences between nations. Constantly pushing ideologies but offering no help will push these nations to turn to U.S. competitors for their issues instead.

Though the U.S. led the world at one point in time, many other nations have also grown, and others continue to do so, vying for room and an impact on the world. Technology has advanced to the point where it can cross with restraint, affecting people in all parts of the world. The world has become interconnected so heavily to the point the U.S. can no longer stand on its own because there are too many issues arising from every side. If the U.S. wants to lead the world, it will need help. If the U.S. wants to keep itself secure, it will need help. If the U.S. wants to adapt, improve, take on the new, and throw out the old, it will need help. Engagement needs to be a critical aspect of the U.S. Grand Strategy. No longer does the U.S., and no longer should the U.S. take on a role that carries all the burden. Instead, the U.S. needs to encourage engagement and solving issues with allies, to promote peace and security.

International Cooperation Policy Recommendations

- I. Pulling out some of the U.S. troops from NATO. While Europe is in the process of adapting to less American presence, the U.S. can have some of the troops that remain in Europe act as a training group/center for European armies to train and learn under while their respective countries increase spending on military training and defensive research.**
 - a. The U.S. and NATO should rethink how to budget their defensive measures and find a way for all members to contribute evenly to the best of their abilities.**
- II. Move NATO away from being primarily a military defense and adapting it to become a defensive group against other security concerns that have arisen in the modern age.**
 - a. Increase in spending on issues related to cyberspace, including crime and defense. The U.S. and NATO should increase investment on research, training, etc. on cyberspace. The U.S. and NATO should continue with strategies relating to openness, free, and peaceful cyberspace between countries, working together to protect interests and solve issues. Punishment should be instilled and enforced for those who use cyberspace to commit crimes that threaten the freedom, speech, values, and security of all people.**
- III. Adopt a strategy of deterrence through collective power. The U.S. should work together closely with countries from various regions of the world to promote security, weaponry, discipline, etc. The U.S. should not deter and fight against issues on their own.**
- IV. Focus on adaptability. The world is changing, many nations have their own views, and issues come and go. The U.S. should create policies that can adapt to growing with the current state of the world, rather than focus on the past or aim for the unachievable immediately.**

A Digital Solution for Critical Infrastructure

Technological advancements across all sectors of critical infrastructure have created lapses in security of aging infrastructure which influence the severity of disruption events and their overall recovery efforts. Improvements across all sectors with specific focus on their cybersecurity aspects will be highly necessary in this digital age. Cybersecurity cannot be limited to the applications related to cybercrime or cyberwarfare. Lessons learned and best practices from developments in the United States can be applied abroad to strengthen the global security of critical infrastructures. In doing so, nations can increase cooperation and collaboration to achieve the development of critical infrastructure and centralize policies of cybersecurity to guarantee security in this digital age. The security of critical infrastructure in the U.S. is of utmost importance given that disruptions impact communities across the country and the recovery after disruptions can be haphazard. Healthcare and public health, transportation systems, and emergency services all face the threat of aging infrastructure and carry cyber security aspects that tend to be overlooked and unaccounted for in resiliency plans. The application of information technology cyber security aspects across these sectors can enhance the system during disruption events. Providing security across all critical infrastructure sectors becomes essential to maintain resiliency in the face of disruption events. As technological advances are implemented across sectors and become increasingly interdependent, resiliency plans require interconnected systems to coordinate effective responses to minimize the effects of disruption events.

As the development of smart cities grows across the world, there needs to be an enhancement of assurance that the cyber aspects of critical infrastructure along with their physical improvements turn into focused efforts in preparation for disruptive events and the

United States' approaches to recovery. This memo covers the intricacies of the interdependent sectors relating to healthcare and public health, transportation systems, and emergency services. Shifting towards necessary 21st century development needs to center the information technology advantages of cybersecurity and can be applied across all aspects of society for the enhancement of aging infrastructure. Current national and global mechanisms for the development and maintenance of critical infrastructure are solely utilized as advisory and guidance strategies, but the U.S. will need to gain additional power to direct and implement these strategies across necessary sectors and government bodies to ensure security within critical infrastructures.

Aging critical infrastructure poses risks to security, this can make the United States vulnerable to potential disruption events, which would overall delay recovery and rebound from any security matter. Disruption events such as data breaches and ransomware targeting the healthcare system,⁴⁶⁵ human error causing disruption in transportation services,⁴⁶⁶ or residual effects from slow recovery post disruption events that target healthcare systems strain emergency services systems⁴⁶⁷ are examples of the negative consequences that aging infrastructure may lead to. These outcomes that ultimately could be evidently damaging to the U.S. government, society, and involvements, can be lessened with the integration of cybersecurity across these sectors and further investments in the field. In the spirit of improving current posture at home, national preparedness for disruption events by enhancing cyber capacities across sectors would ensure efficient recovery and bolstered defense of critical infrastructure in the 21st century. The long-term hopes of this investment, highlights cybersecurity aspects across sectors to be integrated

⁴⁶⁵ "Britain's NHS Reels from a Ransomware Attack."

⁴⁶⁶ Satariano et al., "Chaos and Confusion."

⁴⁶⁷ Gross, "The Aftermath of a U.K. Cyberattack: Blood Shortages and Delayed Operations."

and strengthened within the United Nations Sustainability Development Goals (UNSDG) for global guidelines of development and securing critical infrastructure in the digital age.

United States and Critical Infrastructure Management

The 2024 National Security Memorandum on Critical Infrastructure and Resilience (NSM-22) directs federal agencies to coordinate the development and implementation of plans to secure the 16 sectors that make up the critical infrastructure of the United States.⁴⁶⁸ Throughout this report, these sectors are categorized as covering the security of natural resources (energy sector, nuclear reactors, dams, and water systems), security of services and systems (financial services, government services, healthcare and public health system, transportation system, emergency services, and commercial facilities), security of industry (communications sector, chemical sector, food & agriculture, information technology sector, and critical manufacturing), and the defense industrial base.⁴⁶⁹ This categorization overlaps with the main themes of this paper, regarding the topics of politics, environment, economy, and security. This memo covers three out of the sixteen sectors, which are studied as an interconnected system: healthcare and public health systems, transportation systems, and emergency services. Each sector faces deteriorating infrastructure, therefore effective preparedness across these three sectors ensures rapid recovery post disruption events and lessons learned should be integrated into detection and prevention. Each sector is responsible for their own version of resiliency plans and follows a standardized risk assessment model, but limited guidance is emphasized on how sectors can adapt to the emergence of cyber threats that now impact all aspects of society. Disruption events are not limited to the digital realm. Physical infrastructure is also at risk of cybersecurity threats.

⁴⁶⁸ “National Security Memorandum on Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience.”

⁴⁶⁹ “Critical Infrastructure Sectors | CISA.”

Additionally, the federal agency responsible for these sectors does not have rulemaking authority, which is needed to centralize coordination of resiliency plans across all sectors. This additional authority allows the agency to implement complementary cybersecurity advances as sectors seek to update their aging infrastructure.

Risk management, incidence response, and resiliency for disruption events

The federal agencies outline their perceived risks and resiliency plans, showcasing how they plan to prepare for anticipating disruptions. Their rapid recovery responses are reviewed below. The federal agenda in securing the healthcare and public health sector has identified risks relating to emerging pandemics, climate change, malintent from human activities, disruptions in supply chain systems for medical supplies, risks from cyber-attacks, and space and geospatial risks to power supplies.⁴⁷⁰ The healthcare and public health systems can integrate with 21st century cyber security advancements that can be used to monitor external threats that pose risks to maintaining operation during disruption events. The healthcare and public health system is at risk for cyber disruptions with the advancements in tools used by healthcare professionals as well as increased risks to private patient data as digitization of medical records increases. To address this risk, programs that seek out anomalies within this digital infrastructure can be utilized to monitor and prevent data breaches. Aging infrastructure leaves this data at risk therefore security of the healthcare and public health system in the 21st century must integrate with the existing advancements in protecting the information technology sector. The federal agenda in securing the transportation systems sector has identified risks relating to malintent from human activities, especially terrorism, aging infrastructure, and risks from the effects of climate change.⁴⁷¹ The

⁴⁷⁰ “Healthcare and Public Health Sector-Specific Plan 2016.”

⁴⁷¹ “Transportation Systems Sector-Specific Plan - 2015.”

transportation system sector can readily integrate infrastructure plans to cyber security systems that can be used to enhance their security. One risk in this sector relates to their management systems, which are primarily run using digital networks that operate on software. Software updates can be an entry point for disruption events in which systems can be overrun and altered in a way that can create negative consequences for travelers. To address this risk, the transportation system sector can integrate with existing standards of digital security that are used in the information technology sector. An oversight into the cyber security aspects while updating the aging infrastructure within transportation can lead to a system using outdated digital systems that are not capable of detecting and preventing disruption. Disruption within this sector can leave a nation immobilized. The federal agenda in securing the emergency services sector has identified risks relating to funding mechanisms for services, climate change risks, cybersecurity risks, aging infrastructure, the aging population needing more access to emergency services, and workforce talent gaps.⁴⁷² Finally, the emergency services sector can integrate with advancements in cyber security that allow for fortification against threats that risk patients' data privacy, which can be targeted in disruption events. As an overall system, interdependence across these three sectors must account for identification of aging infrastructure to maximize opportunities for improvements and ensure incident response protocols don't create bottlenecks whenever disruption events occur.

The role of the information technology sector

These examples highlight the need to integrate cybersecurity technologies to ensure security across critical infrastructure sectors in the United States. The federal agenda in securing the information technology sector has identified risks that encompass virtual (disruptions to

⁴⁷² "Emergency Services Sector-Specific Plan 2015."

technologies that detect threats and loss of e-commerce systems) and physical vulnerabilities (disruptions to internet routing systems like underground internet cables).⁴⁷³ Disruption events in this sector can threaten supply chain mechanisms, large-scale events targeting loss of internet access and e-commerce capabilities, physical attacks on routing and undersea cables, or even impact the ability for proper incident response. As the digital age advances access to online technologies, critical infrastructures become at risk for disruption events if nations fail to account that every sector has cybersecurity systems that need maintenance. As national critical infrastructures become more interdependent on each other, disruption events that target gaps in digital security can wreak havoc on nations and delay their recovery. Public-private partnerships in this sector safeguard industry and government partners with the ability to monitor risks with research and development projects and take action to address aging infrastructure in anticipation of disruption events and recovery efforts to limit their impacts across society. One example of a cross-system disruption was the system outages at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.⁴⁷⁴ The Port of Seattle determined that a criminal organization was able to hack into critical systems within airport and injected ransomware that disabled services like baggage, parking, and flight check-in systems. The ransomware was able to bypass encryption protection systems, which is the first line of defense for securing information systems. Had the transportation system already had additional cybersecurity measures in place to complement the existing security framework, then it would have added an additional layer of security to the airport in detection and prevention of this disruption event.

⁴⁷³ “Information Technology Sector-Specific Plan 2016.”

⁴⁷⁴ “Port Cyberattack Archive.”

Limitations of Implementation in the United States

The following will examine the domestic implications of these sector planning to answer the following question regarding necessary actions: How does the United States plan to implement risk management and resilience across the healthcare and public health systems, transportation systems, and emergency services sector? The sector plans for healthcare and public health field enhance their existing risk management mechanisms to ensure security in this field. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how fragile the healthcare and public health systems can be but also showed how necessary a flexible and dynamic coordinated response can be to rebuild from gaps in planning. Research and development programs are built into the sector-specific plans for resiliency. Reflecting and acting upon takeaways from the COVID-19 pandemic and support from presidential mandates, the Department of Defense has incorporated additional surveillance strategies under the guise of biosecurity.⁴⁷⁵ The sector plans for transportation systems to coordinate between federal agencies and industry counterparts to promote the development of research and resiliency plans for the security of this field. The sector plans for the emergency services account for a holistic overview of how other sectors interconnect with each other, specifically looking at collaboration between the healthcare and public health sector and transportation systems. Preparedness is a key aspect of this sector's plan in ensuring direct access to emergency services during times of disruption. Resiliency here is dynamic as anticipation of events and recovery encompasses working with various sections of society, which is the basis for the field of emergency management.⁴⁷⁶ One way to strengthen the coordination in response from each sector is to designate rulemaking authority to the CISA to

⁴⁷⁵ Kosal, "How COVID-19 Is Reshaping U.S. National Security Policy."

⁴⁷⁶ Haase and Demiroz, "Considerations of Resilience in the Homeland Security Literature."

allow for a streamlined standardization system that can be applied broadly and thoroughly amongst the 16 critical infrastructure sectors. The current configuration of the CISA only allows its expertise to be used as a reference point for each sector to implement its own version of emergency preparedness and resiliency plans. A centralized authority allows for direct participation in rulemaking and national resiliency plans which ensure the security of the nation.⁴⁷⁷

Implementation Abroad – the United Nations Sustainability Development Goals (UNSDGs)

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG) provides a framework for global cooperation in development which covers all aspects of human life. One overarching objective that encompasses critical infrastructure is the plan calling for integration of global plans into national development strategies.⁴⁷⁸ For the healthcare and public health sector, one approach for planning in the event of any disruptions, is to execute plans for disaster risk reduction, which link across various global institutions that center global public health and the environment.⁴⁷⁹ The premise is to prepare for disruptions pre-disaster along with plans for post-disaster recovery. UNSDG 11 targets align across environmental protection, sustainable urbanization, and establishment of guidelines towards disaster risk reduction.⁴⁸⁰ Disaster risk reduction plans are tools that can be used to ensure minimal impacts are felt across nations and can be integrated into the security of critical infrastructures. Transportation systems and

⁴⁷⁷ Streich, “(Re-)Configuring Federal Cybersecurity Regulation.”

⁴⁷⁸ “National Strategies and SDG Integration | Department of Economic and Social Affairs.”

⁴⁷⁹ Koçak et al., “The Science of Disaster Medicine.”

⁴⁸⁰ “Goal 11 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs.”

flexibility of electrification. The concept of “inter-sectoral flexibility,”⁴⁸¹ allows for the bridging between the sectors in this subsection: healthcare, transportation, and emergency services. This is critical when anticipating disruption and recovering from outages. UNSDG 9 targets align across the development of sustainable infrastructure and industrialization, further transitions towards alternative energy sources for diversification, and opportunities for developing nations to adopt suitable plans.⁴⁸² Ensuring that global plans for the security of healthcare and public health systems and transportation are vital when ensuring the global security of emergency services. The global effort for this sector falls within the scope of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. The pillars for global capacity building include preparedness and response, which encompasses the capacity building of the emergency services sector in anticipating disruptions and planning for recovery, determining potential risks and threats, and preparing culturally appropriate findings and recommendations across the globe.⁴⁸³ One way to accomplish this task is to build the capacity of hospitals in the form of exercise drills.^{484 485} The healthcare and public health sector and emergency services sector can coordinate in the response to disruption events by practicing these exercise drills, which ensures security within this interdependent system since these two sectors have already been trained in how to restore services after a disruption event.

⁴⁸¹ Heffron et al., “The Role of Flexibility in the Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond.”

⁴⁸² “Goal 9 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs.”

⁴⁸³ “Comprehensive Disaster and Climate Risk Management (CRM).”

⁴⁸⁴ Phattharapornjaroen et al., “The Impact of the Three-Level Collaboration Exercise on Collaboration and Leadership during Scenario-Based Hospital Evacuation Exercises Using Flexible Surge Capacity Concept.”

⁴⁸⁵ Perakslis, “Responding to the Escalating Cybersecurity Threat to Health Care.”

Global integration of cyber aspects into aging critical infrastructure in the U.S.

UNSDG 3 proposes to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages,”⁴⁸⁶ which incorporates the critical infrastructure of healthcare and public health. UNSDG 11 details how to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable,”⁴⁸⁷ which incorporates how to build sustainable transportation systems and emergency services. UNSDG 9 specifically calls to “build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.”⁴⁸⁸ Together, these sustainable development goals provide enough flexibility for nations to incorporate and develop within their own capacities. UNSDGs have a narrowed focus on addressing cybercrimes, but no guidelines in place incorporate cyber security aspects into the plans for the development of infrastructures. Another policy recommendation in this area is to promote addressing cyber-related aspects of critical infrastructure to ensure safety amongst member nations when building resiliency plans. In this manner the UNSDGs become the centralized mechanism for development that can also help its enforcement power grow similarly to the CISA.

Using Cybersecurity to Address Aging Infrastructure

Finally, this section examines the future of the security of critical infrastructure to answer the following question: What policy recommendations can be drawn for the immediate risks due to aging infrastructure and for the next 25 years of development? The United States can integrate the global framework of the UNSDGs when modernizing existing critical infrastructure sector policies to align with the global development agenda for the 21st century. This allows for the

⁴⁸⁶ “Goal 3 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs.”

⁴⁸⁷ “Goal 11 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs.”

⁴⁸⁸ “Goal 9 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs.”

integration of advances in the information technology sector into all aspects of society at home and abroad. Doing so ensures that national and international policies provide additional cybersecurity measures set in place for development in the digital age. One tool that can be included is the Smart City Digital Twin (SCDT) model, which allows experimenting with different development and resiliency plans, and can be utilized in modeling real-world disruption event scenarios.⁴⁸⁹ This model can be applied to modify plans to fit each region and find efficiencies in plans that allow for the preparedness of nations to ensure security. SCDT can model each sector of a nation to determine which sectors are at the most risk during disruption events, which sectors are able to be fortified in preparation of disruption events, and how to integrate resilience into recovery plans.

Conclusion

Investments in fortification of critical infrastructure, with emphasis on their cybersecurity aspects, now and in the future, increase resilience and provide a sense of security in the United States and abroad. Granting additional rulemaking authority in the national agency responsible for cybersecurity of 16 critical infrastructure sectors allows for the centralization of resiliency plans. This also allows for advancements in the information technology sector to be broadly applied across the sectors that can be used to address the aging infrastructure that poses a risk to security. In doing so, the nation can better ensure security and minimize the effects of disruption events.

⁴⁸⁹ Almeida, “Prospects of Cybersecurity in Smart Cities.”

Critical Infrastructure Policy Options

- I. The need for development of a comprehensive cybersecurity society for safety.
reform: rulemaking authority of CISA and centralization across sectors for
better planning and recovery**
- II. Additional training in the incident-response process across all sectors ensures
preparedness to minimize the effect of disruption events.**
- III. Promote cyber-security aspects into development and resiliency policies relating
to critical infrastructure to be integrated into UNSDGs, moving away from
guidance to implementation like CISA**
- IV. Integration of smart city digital twin technology, which allows for the research
and development of tailored cybersecurity techniques across sectors.**

Conclusion

Security is often at the forefront of a nation's choices. In this Grand Strategy, this report has touched upon the economic, environmental, and political interests we believe the U.S. must consider. To protect these interests and to protect the safety and lives of the people, the United States must ensure future security by all means. Without security, U.S. influence, diplomacy, and stability are all at risk for faltering.

The U.S. is not invulnerable, and for far too long the U.S. shouldered the burden of securing peace across the globe. The U.S. must realize it can no longer afford to stand alone and therefore, the U.S. must adopt a stance of collaboration and shared responsibilities, strengthening alliances by sharing global burdens. This collaboration is essential and must be based on fair distributions of security burdens and assignments. Alliances like NATO have been a great benefit in the past to protecting U.S. interests and can continue to be used and improved upon to adapt to current security concerns that are more prevalent in the 21st century, such as cybersecurity. Adaptability is crucial for future U.S. success in engagement, especially within regions like the Middle East. As the U.S. engages, the U.S. needs to raise up others to help shoulder responsibility and take a role, allowing for collective power and collaboration that can help deter future security concerns, crimes, and threats that will continue to arise.

China remains the top security concern, and American military posture must reflect this concern. Furthermore, the rise of hybrid warfare, the Pandora's box of AI, and the existential threat of climate change will shape the military of the future. To engage with such issues, having a realistic military strategy in which the military is able to quickly adapt to new terrains and warfare is absolutely crucial, to ensure future security of the nation.

Current critical infrastructure lacks cybersecurity, creating risks for security, patchwork of resiliency plans across sectors, and global sustainable development targets risk not reaching 2030 goalpost. Therefore, investments must be made to harden and centralize coordination across all critical infrastructure sectors. Current national and global mechanisms for the development and maintenance of critical infrastructure are solely utilized as advisory and guidance strategies but will need to gain additional power to direct and implement these strategies across sectors and government bodies to ensure security within critical infrastructures. Securitization of critical infrastructures requires integration with advancements in the information technology sector, which allow for added security when implementing plans to modernize aging critical infrastructure.

The U.S. holds a lot of responsibility. Internally, the U.S. must care for its own people and ensure that their rights, livelihoods, and assets are protected. This is done not only through changes made within the country, but also through the way the U.S. interacts with the international community. The U.S. has played such a significant role throughout history, that its own people and international friends rely on it. How the U.S. chooses to secure itself in the upcoming years will have a significant impact on the rest of the world. People are relying on the U.S. to lead the way, and it is up to the U.S. to decide how they lead the way, or with whom they lead the way. Security is vital for the rest of the nation's interests to remain free and to have room to grow. Without security, the U.S. would fall apart and the very people the U.S. sought to protect could lose their lives, their rights, their freedoms, and the feeling of safety that they should be able to feel within their own country.

Conclusion

The 21st century has presented itself as an era of rapid geopolitical shifts and growing international cooperation. The United States must navigate the complexities of growing leadership by focusing on domestic strength and collective power abroad. As outlined in this report, ensuring its influence on the world stage requires a commitment to fostering domestic resilience and reform while maintaining a strategic approach and cooperative presence on the global scale.

The challenges outlined in this report — from economic instability and climate change to political polarization and security threats — demand a revised approach in grand strategy. This must consist of both the prioritization of internal stability as well as that of its external and foreign partnerships. All of the challenges mentioned above can be approached through means of investment in strengthening economic foundations, partaking in the involvement of and application of sustainable environmental policies, reinforcing democratic institutions, and modernizing security frameworks. By focusing on domestic reforms, the U.S. can ensure credibility in global engagement, adapting to the current evolving geopolitical prospects, and reinstating itself as an exemplary partner in international stability and growth.

The economy is multifaceted and is engrossed in every aspect of this report. It must be addressed as it serves as the foundation of national power and involvement abroad. Economic instability weakens the United States' ability to maintain its international leadership influence. Issues such as inflation, labor market instability, and housing shortages present themselves as pressing provocations in the U.S. domestic stability, and they must all be addressed through domestic approaches, reforms, and investments. Implementing policies that directly target these

issues, strengthening the workforce development, investing in necessary infrastructure and policies, and ensuring equitable economic opportunities. Doing so will not only prove beneficial at home but also reinforce the U.S.'s credibility on the international stage. Furthermore, an equally important contributor to economic development is trade, and policies regarding it should reflect a balance of both domestic industries while also ensuring the continuation of cooperative engagement through agreements. The current day reliance on tariffs and their intentions have strained relationships between the U.S. and its key economic partners which generally reflect back upon global supply chain disruptions. This therefore ensures the importance of the U.S. instead pursuing policies that emphasize trade agreements instead of protectionist policies, and foster partnerships while maintaining a competitive approach. By doing so, it will ensure that the U.S. remains a central power in the continually evolving global economy.

When considering the future of U.S. grand strategy, climate change and environmental threats stand among the most pressing global challenges of the next century, with profound security, political, and economic consequences. Shifting administrations with varying environmental agendas present a challenge to the ability to maintain a consistent and sustainable approach to climate change. Environmental conflicts cannot be ignored — their impact transcends class, community, and national borders. In order to preserve the strength and well-being of the nation, the U.S. must prioritize the development of enduring environmental policies that promote resilience, sustainability, and international cooperation. By leading global efforts to combat climate change, the U.S. can reinforce its role as a responsible global leader that other nations can trust and follow in example in the international fight against climate change.

A state power's strength is deeply interconnected with the condition of its political institutions. As of recent years, the U.S. has faced a rise in political polarization within its

borders, which ultimately has created a lack of public trust towards the democratic processes. Strengthening democratic institutions, applying further and more extreme transparency within the government, and fostering bipartisan cooperation are all imperative to the restoration of credibility and trust of the federal sector. Institutional stalls within the current governance and the rise of the populist movements have only deepened the societal divide, which undermine the effectiveness in which any domestic or international challenges are addressed. This is why it is imperative for the U.S. government to implement the suggested policy recommendations, by taking concrete approaches in protecting electoral integrity, safeguard human rights, eliminate the spread of misinformation, and other such means. By reinforcing the democratic and legal norms necessary, there will not only be benefits of enhanced domestic cohesion, but also a solidification of the position as a global advocate for democracy.

Security has always been and will remain a cornerstone of U.S. grand strategy. However, as this report has outlined, security is deeply interconnected and impacted by economic, environmental, and political factors. In the 21st century, the nature in which security threats are developing and their implications require a reassessment of military resources and operations, the allocation of critical infrastructure, and the extent of U.S. international engagement. This report argues that a collaborative approach to security is essential. By strengthening strategic alliances and embracing shared power, the U.S. can maintain its international influence while fostering stability and resilience in an increasingly complex world. A strong defense strategy demands not only investment and development, but equally, international cooperation. While the U.S. has historically been the dominant player in international security, shifting towards a collaborative approach with important partnerships such as NATO, the Indo-Pacific, and other strategic alliances to ensure a more balanced approach to burden-sharing.

The strategic decisions and implementations of necessary reforms which are made today will ultimately shape the influence which the U.S. possesses in decades to come. The country's ability to adapt to the ongoing geopolitical shifts within the world, the rapidly evolving technological advancements, and economic changes, will determine the extent to which it will be able to retain its leadership role. By not taking necessary steps such as investing in the development of newer adherent policies, institutions, and infrastructure, it will hinder the progressing demands of strategy and sustainable prosperity for the country. The U.S. additionally must invest in education, further research, and diplomacy, as it is the only way in which the country will be able to further evolve its systems and technologies to maintain consistent power and grand strategy worldwide.

The recommendations which are outlined throughout this report, provide a guideline for sustaining U.S. leadership. In creating a commitment towards fostering economic resilience, environmental sustainability and responsibility, political stability, and modernizing security, it will generate confidence for continued international influence and profitability moving forward. However, this cannot be achieved without sustainable political will, bipartisan, and international cooperation among allied partners. The future of U.S. leadership is largely dependent on the implementation of the policies recommended and addressing the issues listed throughout the report. There must be a careful balance between stability within the country and its involvement in global engagements, domestic strength allows for a better position in advances abroad. By embracing the strategic reforms presented throughout the report, the United States can continue to shape its development towards securing a solid placement within international affairs and ensuring a better future for generations to come.

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