

GLOBAL AND REGIONAL ORDER

# ANTICIPATING A NEW U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

**Lauren Schwartz**  
April 2020



What might a post-Trump American foreign policy look like under a Democratic administration?



Joe Biden could be elected President of the United States in November 2020, and already he faces unprecedented foreign policy challenges.



Yet a President Biden will not simply be able to supervise a restoration of American policy and leadership. He must forge a new political consensus with partners that outlasts the term of a single American President.



2020 will mark a caesura in American foreign policy. This year holds the possibility of Joe Biden's election to the presidency – though this would not immediately reverse the consequences of Trump's term in office – and the political consequences of the novel coronavirus have rapidly drawn into question the very operation of our contemporary globalized world. With cities, states, and countries on lockdown; a global economy ground nearly to a complete stop; and mounting frustration with dysfunctional multilateralism, democracy, and governing institutions; there will be no return to a status quo ante Trump, nor a status quo ante COVID-19.

Considering what a new U.S. foreign policy will look like after Trump and COVID-19 requires understanding the broad strokes of the past 30 years of American foreign policy, the shortcomings of these policies, and how we have entered our present position. Reconsidering a new great power competition as well as what constitutes national security will pose questions of the immediate challenges and possibilities facing the United States. Then, with the de facto nomination of Joe Biden as the Democratic Party's candidate for President, it is necessary to consider the likely shift in Biden's own policy platform to accommodate and unite the divergent wings of the Democratic Party while responding to the challenges of a global pandemic. With these things in mind, it is then possible to speculate upon the new goals of U.S. foreign policy in the near term, including the status of the transatlantic relationship.

### 30 YEARS OF AMBIVALENT FOREIGN POLICY RESULTS

Since 1989, the world has experienced a series of serious shocks or crises to which the United States has been particularly sensitive: the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the 9/11 attacks, the financial crisis, Russian interference in the 2016 elections, the ongoing crisis of global warming, and now, the Coronavirus pandemic.<sup>1</sup> Tom Wright of the Brookings Institution has argued that «COVID-19 is the fourth major geopolitical shock in as many decades. In each of the previous three, analysts and leaders grossly underestimated the long-term impact on their society and world politics.»<sup>2</sup> Certainly, American leadership failed to fully appreciate the consequences (real and hypothetical) of the end of the Cold War, reacting to 9/11, and the financial crisis of 2007–2009. There has been a refusal to seriously react to climate change, exacerbated by the Trump administration's explicitly

1 The enumeration or counting of the crises depends on the interlocutor; these six are arguably the most formative in considering U.S. national security and foreign politics and were enumerated by Max Boot in «Covid-19 is killing off our traditional notions of national defense» *The Washington Post*. 31 March 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/03/31/covid-19-is-killing-off-our-traditional-notions-national-defense/?arc404=true> Accessed 3 April 2020.

2 Tom Wright, «Stretching the International Order to Its Breaking Point» *The Atlantic*. 4 April 2020. [https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/04/pandemic-lasts-18-months-will-change-geopolitics-good/609445/?mc\\_cid=dccf9f6021&mc\\_eid=ca11b29da4](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/04/pandemic-lasts-18-months-will-change-geopolitics-good/609445/?mc_cid=dccf9f6021&mc_eid=ca11b29da4) Accessed 6 April 2020.

denialist position towards the very existence of climate change and reversal of Obama-era climate regulation. It is also doubtful that America has seriously examined the consequences of the 2016 election let alone prepared to defend the 2020 elections.

Following the revolutionary events in Europe in 1989/1990, the post-Cold War consensus on the United States' role in the world was couched in the fallacy of the «end of history» and characterized by the emergence of a vague, optimistic, liberal hegemonic order under American leadership. A coalition from the left and the right in the Washington policy community forged an unlikely agreement around this liberal hegemonic order, emphasizing America's duty and apparent right to protect other states as it saw fit, and the primacy of American force and intervention. It was Charles Krauthammer who grasped the temporary nature of the immediate post-Cold War situation. His assessment posited that there existed only a «unipolar moment» of undisputed American hegemony, with imminent threats from emerging competing powers and smaller «weapon states» that held deep-seated resentments against the west and the potential for great disruption.<sup>3</sup> Krauthammer's assertion that a unipolar moment would usher in an increased threat of war with dubious support from the American people did not reflect the optimistic foreign policy consensus in Washington.

This bipartisan coalition and consensus surrounding the liberal hegemonic order met with an uneven record of success in the 1990s, particularly in Europe. Washington valued NATO and the E.U. as critical allied structures and partners to integrate and shape Eastern Europe in the post-Cold War order, though the acknowledgement of these important organizations was eclipsed by an increased concern about burden-sharing in Europe's role in its own defense. This concern, like the success of NATO and U.S.-E.U. cooperation in Europe in the 1990s, was in its own turn eclipsed by the 9/11 attacks. In response to the attacks, Article 5 of the NATO treaty was invoked, obligating members to come to the aid of the United States. The nagging concern about member contributions and burden-sharing in Europe would go on hiatus for nearly a decade.

The response to the 9/11 attacks resulted not only in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, increasing tensions with European allies and the E.U., but also in a disproportionate and almost blinding focus on counterterrorism as the singular purpose of the United States in the world. The narrow military successes of U.S. engagements in ending various regimes abroad were usually followed by political disappointment and policy failure which has lasted for decades.<sup>4</sup>

3 Charles Krauthammer, «The Unipolar Moment» in *Foreign Affairs*. Vol 70, No 1, 1990. 23–33.

4 «Indeed, the spectacular achievement of military objectives alongside unsatisfactory political results has been a hallmark of post-Cold War interventions.» Rebecca Friedman Lissner, «Military Intervention and the Future of American Grand Strategy» in *New Voices in Grand Strategy*, Center for a New American Security, 2019. 49–59. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/documents/Grand-Strategy-Report-Final-online-1.pdf?mtime=20190408141828>

This inability of American intervention to successfully build liberal states in the American image – the great inspiration of liberal interventionists – has resulted instead in regional quagmires and the questioning of American authority, credibility, and commitments, as well as reputational injury to the United States and a toxicity in American domestic politics.

The intractability of American engagements in the Middle East also fueled regional destabilization, while coinciding with the rise of China as a long-term challenge. Counterterrorism engagements distracted from serious action to understand or counterbalance Beijing. While it was a goal of the first Obama administration to pivot away from the Middle East to Asia in order to address the growing regional and geopolitical competition posed by China, this deliberate announcement of a »pivot to Asia« exacerbated tensions in the transatlantic relationship. More unfortunate still was that Obama could not actually withdraw from all Middle East involvements as completely or quickly as he had hoped (if at all), resulting in reactive policy towards China in Asia and extant American obligations in the MENA region, with neither regional policy proving as effective or optimal as hoped.

Like Presidents Clinton and Bush before him, early in his first term, President Obama attempted to revitalize the U.S.-Russian relationship on a personal level with Vladimir Putin. Despite the short presidency of Dmitry Medvedev in Russia and the much touted »Russia Reset« in 2009, these attempts at revitalization did not result in U.S.-Russian rapprochement, and for the length of his Presidency, Obama and his administration consistently underestimated Putin's Russia. From 2014, with the invasion of Crimea and Ukraine, Russia asserted itself anew as a geopolitical actor instigating intense geopolitical conflict in Europe's backyard. But Russia has not limited itself to dyspeptic historical grievance and competition manifested in the regional destabilization of Eastern Europe. It has also become a central issue of American domestic politics since the last presidential election. Benjamin Haddad and Alina Polyakova have noted

*Russia is very much a 21<sup>st</sup> century power that understands how to avail itself of the modern tools available to it, often much better than we do ourselves. The same intellectual tendencies that shaped Obama's timid approach to Ukraine were reflected in his administration's restrained response as evidence of Russian electoral interference began to emerge in the summer of 2016.*<sup>5</sup>

While President Trump openly praises Vladimir Putin, his own administration took a more confrontational geopolitical stance against Russia – with the large and notable blind spot of previous and current election interference.

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin Haddad and Alina Polyakova, »Don't rehabilitate Obama on Russia« *The Brookings Institution*. 5 March 2018. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/03/05/dont-rehabilitate-obama-on-russia/> Accessed 8 April 2020.

Insofar as a coherent Trump administration foreign policy existed up to early 2020, it was guided by a belligerent stance neither consistently revanchist nor explicitly interventionist, and a return to a focus on great power competition specifically to counter China and Russia.<sup>6</sup> Former Trump administration officials summarized Washington's position in late 2019 as having

*... signaled its willingness and ability to adopt a more competitive approach towards its rivals, militarily, economically and diplomatically. [...] Yet this is only the beginning of what is likely to be a decades-long effort. China shows no sign of giving up its pursuit of ascendancy in Asia. Moscow looks no more likely to mend ties with the West; if anything, it is deepening its partnership with Beijing. The United States, then, must prepare for a for a generational effort.*<sup>7</sup>

While the Trump administration laid much of American global leadership to waste, there is validity in the calls for a sober assessment of the challenges China and Russia will pose to the United States. A generational effort to respond to these illiberal geopolitical regimes will confront an incoming Democratic U.S. President. The nature of this response – and how it is to respond to imminent future threats rather than outdated scenarios based on Cold War or immediate post-9/11 threat perceptions – remains to be fully developed. The response to other geopolitical conflicts and the specific reconstruction of damaged alliances will be dependent on how the United States changes its broad strategies towards great power competition.

## RETHINKING GREAT POWER COMPETITION AND WHAT CONSTITUTES NATIONAL SECURITY

The assumption that we have returned to an era of great power competition – indeed, that it is a historical norm rather than an exception – does not mean there is agreement on the nature of this competition. But disagreement does not preclude a shift in how we approach new great power competition. A new American foreign policy should expand its reach beyond the military – though not eliminate it – by considering the many non-military factors that feed into foreign cooperation and the pursuit of American national security. A restored emphasis and renewed relationship with liberal American allies, reconsideration of budgetary priorities in achieving security goals, and a new economic philosophy are all critical elements of building a better American position in a new great power competition, ensconced and reflected in values-based policy.

<sup>6</sup> See Elbridge A. Colby and A. Wess Mitchell, »The Age of Great-Power Competition: How the Trump Administration Refashioned American Strategy« in *Foreign Affairs*. 10 December 2019. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-12-10/age-great-power-competition> Accessed 23 January 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Colby and Mitchell, »The Age of Great-Power Competition: How the Trump Administration Refashioned American Strategy«.

A wave of heterodox thought in Washington (illustrative, among others, through the new think tank *The Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft* funded by the liberal philanthropist George Soros and the conservative philanthropist Charles Koch) is investigating this new great power competition, specifically in response to Russia and China. A reconsideration of grand strategy has resulted in two competing approaches. The first approach is a ›grand strategy of preservation,‹ which argues for the solidification and defense of the current liberal international order and calls neither for retrenchment nor expansion.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, a ›grand strategy for the many‹ prioritizes the demilitarization of U.S. foreign policy and focuses on combating climate change as a major national security priority.<sup>9</sup> Despite the active competition in the U.S. Democratic Party between its centrist and progressive wings, no progressive foreign policy proposal thus far explicitly embraces either of these radical grand strategy proposals, although elements of both frequently appear in debates on what shape a new U.S. foreign policy should take.

In direct contrast to the post-Cold War strategy maintained by the United States, there is a temptation to pursue a strategy of retrenchment or withdrawal after two decades of ›endless wars‹ and engagements abroad. The likelihood of enacting a strategy of retrenchment seems highly unlikely, now that Joe Biden is the presumptive Democratic Presidential candidate. This is a positive development: strictly following a strategy of retrenchment, no matter whether it would be justified via progressive or realist concern, would be misguided. It would abandon allies abroad and exacerbate regional security challenges in Eurasia, send a message of default national self-reliance that could be interpreted to mean anything from xenophobic policy to nuclear proliferation, and alienate the sentiments of many Americans who don't want forever wars but don't believe in complete retrenchment, either.<sup>10</sup> However, the pursuit of *selective* retrenchment could be strategically constructive, particularly if it means concluding engagement in Afghanistan, or reassessing relationships with Saudi Arabia or other authoritarian states.

Rethinking great power competition and retrenchment is only part of rethinking national security. Max Boot, an erstwhile conservative turned centrist commentator has noted in the *Washington Post* that since 2001

*that there have been so many emergencies that fall outside of traditional ›national security‹ parameters calls into question whether [the United States] are spending our \$738 billion defense budget on the right priorities. [...]*

8 Hal Brands, »Grand Strategy for a New Twilight Struggle« in *New Voices in Grand Strategy*. Center for a New American Security, 2019. 13–22.

9 Stephen Wertheim, »The Price of Primacy: Why America Shouldn't Dominate the World« in *Foreign Affairs*. Vol. 99, No. 2. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2020-02-10/price-primacy>

10 Thomas Wright, »The Folly of Retrenchment: Why America Can't Withdraw from the World« in *Foreign Affairs*. Vol. 99, No. 2. [https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2020-02-10/folly-retrenchment?fa\\_package=1125551](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2020-02-10/folly-retrenchment?fa_package=1125551)

*What we really need is a more radical rethink of the whole concept of ›national security‹. It never made any sense, as Trump's 2021 budget had initially proposed, to increase nuclear spending by \$7 billion while cutting [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] funding by \$1.2 billion.<sup>11</sup>*

The failure of the Trump administration to take seriously the attempted protocols created following the Obama administration responses to the Ebola crisis of 2014–2016 has been frequently cited as the Coronavirus crisis has escalated. Ben Rhodes, a former official in the Obama administration, noted that ›the clearest harbinger... of the future we're now living in came in the fall of 2014.«<sup>12</sup> This self-inflicted damage as a result of the Trump administration – from ignoring protocol and underfunding relevant bureaucracies – is unfortunately nowhere near over, and it is not yet clear just how greatly this negligence has endangered the health of American citizens nor compromised the security of the country. As Rhodes notes, echoing Boot,

*It makes no sense that the Pentagon's budget is 13 times larger than the entire International Affairs budget, which funds the State Department, USAID, and global programs at other agencies. The entire pandemic-preparedness budget is a rounding error compared with a trillion-dollar plan to modernize America's nuclear-weapon infrastructure.<sup>13</sup>*

This convergence of thought from the center right and the center left upon the point that national security as a basically and exclusively militaristic area of foreign policy is manifestly inadequate is a striking shift in thought from the immediate post-9/11 conception of national security. It is also notable that at least in some Washington discourse bipartisan consensus is being built around points that were previously the purview of progressive foreign policy thinkers.

The consequences of a limited, militaristic view of national security blinding the U.S. to this public health crisis also reveals the degree to which a 21<sup>st</sup> century foreign policy must be couched in economic policy, not just health or military policy. Jennifer Harris and Jake Sullivan assert that

*U.S. foreign policy makers now face a world in which power is increasingly measured and exercised in economic terms [...] Today's national security experts need to move beyond the prevailing neoliberal economic philosophy of the past 40 years.<sup>14</sup>*

11 Boot, »Covid-19 is killing off our traditional notions of national defense«.

12 Ben Rhodes. »The 9/11 Era is Over«. *The Atlantic*. 6 April 2020. [https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/04/its-not-september-12-any-more/609502/?mc\\_cid=dccf9f6021&mc\\_eid=ca11b29da4](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/04/its-not-september-12-any-more/609502/?mc_cid=dccf9f6021&mc_eid=ca11b29da4) Accessed 7 April 2020.

13 Ben Rhodes. »The 9/11 Era is Over«.

14 Jennifer Harris and Jake Sullivan. »America Needs a New Economic Philosophy. Foreign Policy Experts Can Help.« *Foreign Policy*. 7 February 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/02/07/america-needs-a-new-economic-philosophy-foreign-policy-experts-can-help/> Accessed 20 March 2020.

But how to reject neoliberal economic policy and create a new economic philosophy in line with a liberal foreign policy? Harris and Sullivan argue for investment (even if it means incurring debt so long as it is good debt ensuring long-term competitiveness); a return to industrial policy (not just as a matter of innovation or infrastructure, but also to address climate change and in order to stay competitive with China); a critical eye towards future trade agreements (»U.S. trade policy has suffered too many mistakes over the years to accept pro-deal arguments at face value.«); and the startling idea that »foreign-policy experts must dispense with the notion that what's good for U.S.-based multinational corporations is necessarily good for the United States.«<sup>15</sup> A new Democratic national security policy will have to broadly consider health-care and pandemic preparedness, as well as economic policy, and it will have to ask questions of traditional notions of national security and foreign policy with which neither have seriously dealt.

## THE FOREIGN POLICY OF A BIDEN ADMINISTRATION, AND THE FUTURE OF THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP

Earlier in the primary campaign, Joe Biden was criticized for conducting a campaign that seemed to espouse an impossible restoration or return to a status quo ante Trump – a kind of third-term Obama Administration with corresponding moderate foreign policy. Now that the presumptive-nominee Biden has been endorsed by Bernie Sanders, conducting his campaign from a makeshift headquarters from his home in Delaware as most of the United States and the world shelters in place in reaction to the Coronavirus, the illusion of a restoration or return has finally fallen away. If he is to win the Presidency and lead successfully, Biden must manage a global crisis that has been mismanaged up to this point. Although Sanders has suspended his campaign for the nomination and endorsed his centrist rival, he remains a leader of the progressive wing of the Democratic Party, and Biden must be able to welcome supporters of Sanders into his electoral and governing coalition.

Already it is fair to speak of a »Sanders effect« – that is, a new consideration of what is possible and what could be expected from the United States federal government – in foreign policy, just as we have begun to see a leftward shift in discourse around U.S. domestic policy.

Biden and those surrounding him seem to grasp »that U.S. foreign policy must change and move beyond where democrats have been the past two decades.«<sup>16</sup> The post-9/11 securitization of immigration did not serve to benefit American domestic politics, but militarized domestic discourse from ev-

erything from immigration to what rudimentary social benefits do exist in the United States. In our current crisis, rhetorically styling the fight against COVID-19 as fighting a war does nothing to address the nature of the problem. Mass mobilization of capital is necessary, but the leadership solutions and investments required are not necessarily military in nature.

A post-Trump American foreign policy under Joe Biden must recognize that a good and effective foreign policy is a product or function of having effective politics at home. A striking example of this interrelatedness of the foreign and domestic is the COVID-19 crisis, relating American domestic policy to its international policy. As Tom Wright and Kurt Campbell have noted,

*A Biden administration will have to design careful, constructive steps to rebuild public trust even as the reaction to the pandemic will likely continue to cleave [along party lines]. ... The Trump administration has failed to lead and organize the world in responding to COVID-19. Trump, at times, alienated allies when he enacted uncoordinated travel bans and competed with them for scarce medical resources. This behavior has undoubtedly made the crisis worse, but cooperation will be much more important at the end of the pandemic than it was at the beginning.<sup>17</sup>*

The current pandemic is an unprecedented test-case in the confluence of the domestic and international, the stress on the paltry American system of social benefits in ways unimaginable in Europe, the great power competition between the United States and China, and the abdication of American leadership at home and abroad. Emerging from the other side of the election, Joe Biden will be confronted with a set of interrelated problems of a magnitude not seen since the end of World War Two.<sup>18</sup>

Another thorny example of the interrelationship of domestic and foreign policy concerns financial regulation. Dealing with oligarchy and autocracy abroad requires eliminating the loopholes in domestic politics that allow global corruption to operate, sometimes on American soil and capitalizing on American regulatory gaps or failure. It is suspected that eliminating such financial and tax-evasion loopholes would have been key foreign policy tools (not just domestic policy tools) under a Sanders or Warren administration. These measures would have been especially hawkish, despite being non-military in nature. The likelihood or extent to which Joe Biden – whose home state of Delaware operates as the preeminent U.S. domestic tax haven – would adopt these progressive fi-

<sup>15</sup> Harris and Sullivan, »America Needs a New Economic Philosophy. Foreign Policy Experts Can Help«.

<sup>16</sup> Tom Wright, »The Foreign Policy of the 2021 Democrats« *The Atlantic*. 19 March 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/foreign-policy-2021-democrats/608293/> Accessed 20 March 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Tom Wright and Kurt M. Campbell, »If Biden Wins, He'll Have to Put the World Back Together« in *The Atlantic*. 13 April 2020. [https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/04/biden-will-inherit-post-pandemic-world/609853/?utm\\_content=edit-promo&utm\\_campaign=the-atlantic&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_term=2020-04-13T10%253A30%253A07&utm\\_source=twitter](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/04/biden-will-inherit-post-pandemic-world/609853/?utm_content=edit-promo&utm_campaign=the-atlantic&utm_medium=social&utm_term=2020-04-13T10%253A30%253A07&utm_source=twitter) Accessed 13 April 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Wright and Campbell, »If Biden Wins, He'll Have to Put the World Back Together«.



nancial policies is unclear. But there are other, still more obvious areas in which a Biden administration would be able to pursue a new and non-military foreign policy.

The most obvious of these – and perhaps the one most taken for granted – is a reinvestment in diplomacy. The United States will need the expertise and human capital of a fleshed-out professional diplomatic corps, as well as the soft-power complements to ensure a generational effort in a new foreign policy. Underinvestment in expertise and state institutions has long been a criticism of American domestic and foreign policy from the left, and the wholesale undermining of and attacks on expertise in the federal bureaucracy on the part of Donald Trump and his administration has eviscerated the ability of the American state to quickly restore or expand its diplomatic capabilities. Lost bureaucracies and expertise will have to be rebuilt over years, despite the urgent need for American leadership and perspective in regional conflicts. The need for American diplomats with regional expertise is obvious when you consider U.S. involvement in the Middle East and the challenges posed by China, but diplomacy is also the formal basis for our alliances and partnerships, especially with Europe and the European Union.

Under a Biden administration, we can anticipate that the United States will almost immediately change its rhetorical approach toward our European allies, recognizing the importance of strategic and values-based partnerships, as well as returning to constructive rhetoric and action. Of course, the restoration of lost trust will take many years, not simply a matter of weeks, but the work cannot begin soon enough. Part of this restoration requires a broader understanding of the components of the transatlantic relationship. Seen from Washington, the relationship operates simultaneously on four paths: U.S.-European Union, bilateral U.S.-European states (E.U. members and non-E.U. members), intra-European relations, and NATO. An unfortunate tendency in general U.S. discourse is to confound these four paths, or use them as synonyms, must be halted and reversed, so we can address our European partners with clarity and understanding. This rhetorical shift would also be a substantive one, broadening the transatlantic partnership from the tendency to overtly securitize the relationship in terms of NATO.

Concerning NATO, the United States should reaffirm its faith in the value of the alliance it built and essentially led for 70 years. The U.S. military will not disappear if American foreign policy is reconsidered and broadened from the path it has taken in the last 20 years. Indeed, the NATO alliance has an important diplomatic function, including its military composition. Even in the early 1990s, debates on the future of

NATO in view to its ostensible obsolescence – either going away or being reinvented in the manner of the OSCE – gained no traction, and were followed not by contraction, but NATO expansion. A 21<sup>st</sup> century NATO must maintain a commitment to protecting European allies against a revanchist Russia, but it also needs to consider vulnerabilities to Europe created by China, and how NATO will remain interoperable despite technological advancement and divergent standards and norms for tech in the U.S. and Europe. Another necessary part of the future of the NATO alliance is for the United State to stop harping on the 2 % spending commitment – part of the decades-old concern about burden-sharing with Europe. A simple but infrequently pursued thought experiment should provide sufficient justification for this position: assuming American foreign policy in the Middle East shifts from the heavy military presence of the past 20 years, this pull-back would create consequences for Europe, right in its neighborhood, that only Europe would be stuck with – migration, integration, security, economic stressors. Europe would be landed with the costs and management of these challenges.

If successful in his Presidential bid, Joe Biden will have been elected despite Russian election interference, while pledging a return to diplomacy in relations with Iran and signaling a willingness to reconsider the American relationship towards Saudi Arabia. Pledging a return to diplomacy with Iran would be a restoration of Obama-era policy that contributed to the JCPOA, and the reconsideration of the U.S.-Saudi relationship an indication that Biden would no longer continue the status quo. Additionally, a Biden administration must find a way to cooperate with China on combatting climate change, while also determining where and how to push back against China in great power competition. The advantage that the United States has over China is primarily in our system of alliances and partnerships – though these need investment and repair after sustaining serious damage under the Trump administration.

The larger challenge Biden will have beyond damage repair – and that will be posed to his successors in the Oval Office – is to create a new and durable consensus with allies and partners, a political compact that outlasts a single presidency. The question that American politics can't anticipate an answer to is what European leadership and politics will look like in January 2021. What could a Biden administration build with European leadership that looks very different from 2009, 2012, or 2016? How receptive would Europe – would Berlin or Brussels or Paris or London – be to ambitious cooperation and a new political compact less than a year from now?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## ANTICIPATING A NEW U.S. FOREIGN POLICY



What might a post-Trump American foreign policy look like under a Democratic administration? Joe Biden could be elected President of the United States in November 2020, and already he faces unprecedented foreign policy challenges: taking U.S. foreign policy beyond the dysfunction of the past twenty years, responding to largest truly global crisis in living memory in the Coronavirus pandemic, and mending the severe institutional and reputational damage caused by the Trump administration.



If elected, Biden will not supervise an impossible restoration to a pre-Trump, pre-COVID-19 status quo. He will have to confront new great power competition as well as expand the definition of what constitutes national security.



The likely shift in Biden's own policy platform to accommodate and unite the divergent wings of the Democratic Party while responding to the challenges of a global pandemic will have an impact on the goals of U.S. foreign policy in the near term, including the status of the transatlantic relationship. Ultimately, Biden must forge a new political consensus with partners that outlasts the term of a single American President.

Further information on the topic can be found here:  
[www.fes.de/international/wil](http://www.fes.de/international/wil)