According to President Donald J. Trump, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is “obsolete.” 1 The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) “cost the U.S. millions of jobs.” 2 The multilateral Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) was “an attack on America’s business.” 3 Rather, “bilateral deals are far more efficient, profitable, and better for OUR workers.” 4 The World Trade Organization (WTO) needs to “shape up”: “If they don’t shape up, I would withdraw from the WTO.” 5 The United Nations (UN) “is not a friend” of the United States; “America will always choose independence and cooperation over global governance, control,

2. Donald J. Trump, Twitter, 1 September 2018, 8:12 a.m., http://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump.
and domination…. We reject the ideology of globalism.”

A brief scan of books and articles in the popular press, authored by prominent international relations and foreign policy scholars, confirms a wide-spread and growing concern that United States retrenchment from the international order is accelerating, causing the perception of a leadership vacuum over the management of the international order. By contrast, a more nuanced understanding of the Trump administration’s position would draw a distinction between its view of the international order and U.S. foreign policy. The Trump administration is dissatisfied with, and skeptical of, collaboration through international order alliances and institutions, as the quotations in the epigraph above suggest. The administration harbors strong opposition to the ideology underpinning U.S. foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. In particular it rejects a foreign policy based on an assertive liberal internationalist ideology that seeks to impose individual rights, western values, and democracy around the globe.

The Trump administration’s position is not the only driver of change

placing pressure on the international order, however. Among the most influential factors are geoeconomic and geopolitical changes affecting nation-state relationships within the international community. The rise of China and the prospect of China achieving peer-status with the U.S. in economic influence (and military power derived from its prosperity) is the most pressing driver of change in the international order. The relative relationship of U.S. and Chinese economic power trends are dependent on each of these country’s internal politics and ability to adapt to the external competitive environment. Neither country is likely to derail the other’s economic path using external pressure. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the influence of U.S. domestic politics on change in the international order. Therefore, the economic and political implications of a rising China are examined in the context of their impact on U.S. foreign policy. The most significant security implication of China’s rise—and a return to a multipolar world—is the need for the U.S. to abandon the engagement and enlargement foreign policy it has pursued since the Cold War.  

Domestic politics and international geopolitical trends, reflected in populist-nationalist movements across many societies, also place significant pressure on the international order. Populist-nationalist movements such as Brexit in Britain, the Five Star Movement in Italy, the Arab Spring in Anbar, Egypt, and the Maghreb; and the emergence of nationalist leaders around the globe, such as President Vladimir Putin in Russia, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey, Prime Minister Andrej Babis in the Czech Republic, President Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in India, all suggest that the populist-nationalist trend extends well beyond the United States. Currently twenty countries around the globe are under some form of populist government. This indicates a growing uneasiness with existing international order, distrust of policy elites, and an inflection point in the foreign policy choices pursued by many affected nations. Domestic politics in the U.S. are being driven by similar populist sensibilities. According to Pew Research Center, 71 percent of the U.S. public believe
political elites are out of touch with what they think.\textsuperscript{13}

The U.S. is the chief architect and the principal leader and norm enforcer of the international order. If that role changes, then the status quo order is likely to change. This chapter examines how U.S. popular opinion, as reflected by the Trump administration, presents a new view of the appropriate U.S. role in the international order. The Trump administration only enjoys a plurality of support for his foreign policy positions, and particularly his mistrust of the institutions of the international order. Further, the Trump administration’s foreign policy favorability ratings are heavily skewed along partisan lines. However, a majority of Americans are confident he can negotiate favorable trade agreements, and nearly half (49 percent) believe he will make good decisions about economic policy.\textsuperscript{14} President Trump’s plurality of support determined the outcome of the 2016 election, and those election results are affecting how the U.S. is engaging the world. Indicators of changing domestic perceptions are reflected in the dissonance between traditional policy positions and current behavior, and emerging new narratives regarding U.S. foreign policy.

This chapter’s analysis acknowledges the benefits derived from a stable international order, enjoyed since the end of the Second World War. Given that context, the bulk of the chapter examines pressures on the international order, populist-nationalist trends in U.S. domestic politics, and changing U.S. public perceptions of U.S. foreign policy relative to the international order. The “blame it on” construct of the chapter sections offer various explanations for heightened risk or pressure on traditional U.S. foreign policy positions, and therefore pressure for international order change. The chapter concludes by speculating on the future of the international order and U.S. foreign policy.

**Competing Leadership: Blame It on China’s Rise**

The status quo order has not been a static arrangement among states. To maintain stable relations, it has undergone significant change over


the last seventy years, adapting to the changing demands of the global community. Recent changes include an increased number of UN member states, NATO expansion that absorbed former Warsaw Pact states, China’s executive board membership on the International Monetary Fund, and China’s admission to the World Trade Organization. Despite criticisms that economically weak and developing countries have been left behind, the institutions responsible for setting and overseeing international order norms and standards have been relatively inclusive, expansive, and adaptive over the years.

In his recent book, *The Jungle Grows Back: America and Our Imperiled World*, Robert Kagan argues that the U.S., the West, and others (including China) have enjoyed tremendous advances in prosperity and peace as a result of the United States–led international order. Acknowledging failures and costs, Kagan argues that democracy, economic prosperity, and peace among great powers have been advanced because of the enlightened self-interest approach to leadership by the United States. He further argues a more controversial position: that without U.S. leadership, relations among nations will revert to the poverty, authoritarianism, and instability that characterized great power relations prior to the Second World War. Kagan therefore advocates for a U.S. recommitment to the institutions of the international order. Others, like Jon Meacham, are optimistic that the U.S. can overcome its current political turmoil and reconnect with its core values, making it worthy of the leadership role.16

Critics argue that the current international order must fundamentally change to adapt to the existing geostrategic environment, or risk being replaced by a rival system. Voices of change advocate for an updated governance structure that more closely reflects the geostrategic power structure of the twenty-first century, a development model that offers more opportunity to undeveloped nations, and capital loan practices that imposes fewer ideological barriers to access.

Both internally and externally, China is directly challenging the existing international order and the institutions that govern it. Optimists have largely abandoned the hope that China would find the barriers to entry so low, and the probability of prosperity so attractive, that China would assimilate the underlying values of the international order.

China’s illiberal governance structure and underlying value system call into question Beijing’s willingness to assimilate into the order. China is regularly accused of intellectual property theft, currency manipulation, market protectionism, predatory loan practices, and opaque trade agreements backed by coercive state pressure.\textsuperscript{17}

Further, China is asserting its own vision of a Chinese-led international order. It has created capital investment banks and lending practices to operationalize its vision, effectively establishing a competing set of international order institutions. The most publicized is arguably the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). To execute the BRI the multinational Asian Infrastructure Bank led by Jin Liqun, a Chinese banker and politician, established relationships and pledged funds to many countries throughout the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. According to Boston University’s Global Development Policy Center, developing countries receive as much financing from the China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China as they do from the World Bank.\textsuperscript{18} China also created the New Development Bank with Brazil, India, Russia, and South Africa.

Through this financing, China is addressing an estimated $3 trillion capital development and infrastructure need around the world. In return for loans, China does not require controversial policy choices on human rights, deregulated markets, or privatization of public companies—a common characteristic of western order capital loan deals.\textsuperscript{19} However, critics claim China is not committed to international norms of transparency and the collective good. Contract terms, especially those negotiated between China and authoritarian regimes behind closed doors, are suspected of being predatory. China requires collateral to back its loans, often acquiring facilities, real estate, and mineral rights associated with their investment projects if the projects fail. Two often cited examples of this happening are the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka and Venezuela’s national oil company and associated mineral rights.

As a result of China’s growing influence and assertive behavior,


\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
the U.S. finds itself in an international environment where rival actors could rapidly destroy or render obsolete U.S. competitive advantage.\textsuperscript{20} In the 1990s, Richard A. D’Aveni of Dartmouth University described this environment in the business context as hypercompetition.\textsuperscript{21} A hypercompetitive environment is characterized by rapidly eroding transient advantage, and frequent disruptions to established norms of cooperation and competition. In this environment, all interactions must be evaluated in the relative context of sequential rival counter-actions. The speed and intensity of competitive escalation requires new strategies for survival. Traditional strategies seeking semi-permanent advantage and cooperative behavior to advance stability are out-maneuvered by disruptive rivals.\textsuperscript{22} Collective action, based on formal consensus decision making, is seldom agile enough to gain advantage in a hypercompetitive environment.

In part, changing U.S. foreign policy norms and retrenchment from its traditional commitment to lead the international order is a reaction to the rise of China, its growing assertiveness, and the emergence of a multi-polar hypercompetitive security environment. The shift in U.S. security policy is also driven by U.S. domestic politics. A growing public skepticism of policy elite assumptions, dissatisfaction with foreign policy outcomes, and mistrust of international order institutions animate the U.S. domestic populist movement. A growing public consensus is skeptical of the international order, and whether the foreign policy to advance it protects their interests.

**Flawed Assumptions: Blame It on the Blob**

From the administrations of George H. W. Bush to Barack Obama, the U.S. pursued an expansionist national security strategy and foreign

\textsuperscript{20} Examples of the growing capabilities of rivals to the U.S. include China’s nascent hypersonic capability, Beijing’s advances in the cyber and space competitive environment and the weaponization of information, and the manipulation of social media as a delivery platform by the Russian Federation.


\textsuperscript{22} Nathan Freier, James Hayes, Michael Hatfield, and Lisa Lamb, “Game On or Game Over: Hypercompetition and Military Advantage,” (United States Army War College War Room, 22 May 2018), [https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/articles/the-new-defense-normal-nine-fundamentals-of-hypercompetition/](https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/articles/the-new-defense-normal-nine-fundamentals-of-hypercompetition/). This article applies D’Aveni’s business concept to an international security context.
policy. This expansionist agenda was enabled by a perception that the U.S. enjoyed what Charles Krauthammer called a “unipolar moment.” Policy elites were mobilized by seemingly uncontested U.S. global power. Ben Rhodes, Obama’s speech writer, coined the phrase “The Blob” to describe foreign policy elites who are unified in their approach to project western values through intervention, but are increasingly out of touch with U.S. populist sensibilities. The bipartisan “Blob” contains both liberal-progressive and neo-conservative zealots. Criticism for pushing back against the Blob’s sensibilities is also bipartisan. Obama’s administration, not just the Trump administration, was criticized for several foreign policy choices that pushed back against the elite’s interventionist tendencies.

In The Hell of Good Intentions, Stephen Walt examines the conditions that lead to the Blob adopting a common view of world affairs. The Blob adheres to a belief system that advocates the benefits of globalization and collective security, proselytizing democracy and western values, and asserting a rule-of-law and universal individual rights agenda. The Blob employs U.S. foreign policy to project these values around the world. It further advocates for a U.S. leadership role as the guarantor of these values.

The Trump administration represents a radically different foreign policy platform, condemning institutions of the international order and the policy elite’s globalist approach. Walter Russell Mead characterized the Trump administration narrative as most closely aligning with the Jacksonian foreign policy tradition in the United States.


26. Among these choices were the withdrawal of troops from Iraq, “leading from behind” in Libya, and not enforcing “red lines” in Syria.


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lian scholars, Michael Clarke and Anthony Ricketts, expanded on this thesis, describing the motivation, key themes, and political style adopted by Jacksonian populist-nationalists.29 Their description of the tradition provides a basis for understanding the Trump administration’s “America First” and “Make America Great Again (MAGA)” campaign slogans.

According to Clarke and Ricketts, Jacksonians are primarily motivated by a pessimistic view of the political elite, and a fear of concentrated central government power influenced by that elite. This view is fueled by a visceral perception that the elite leadership has let the public down, and that the U.S. suffers at the hands of a global community. This populist view is fueled by a semi-formed cornucopia of negative issues that combine concerns about job loss, reliance on foreign supply chains, unlawful immigration, cheating (unfair markets, intellectual property theft, state and individual “free-riding”), eroding western values, and a general perception of U.S. decline and failure around the globe.

Walter Russell Mead suggests Jeffersonian populist-nationalist movements are defined by the principles of populism, individualism, honor, and courage. Their principles are grounded in individual and national identity versus a global collective identity. Disenchanted populists reject elites, and rally behind (usually charismatic and emotionally energized) populist leaders.30 These leaders are animated by an instinct to promote the political, economic, and moral well-being of what Clarke and Ricketts call “the folk community.”31

Jacksonian nationalists endorse a minimalist foreign policy ethos. They are anti-globalist, but not isolationist. On pragmatic grounds, they reject the effectiveness of a crusading U.S. committed to the advancement of western values. They apprehend that the liberal elite’s foreign policy overextends resources, relieves like-minded nations of their share of regional burdens, and promotes futile attempts to reform theocratic and autocratic societies that reject western values. Jacksonians are not willing to underwrite international political and economic institutional governance; however, they are willing to cooperate with

30. Among U.S. presidents, Theodore Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Ronald Reagan are often categorized as historic populist-leaders.
other nations to the extent the U.S. controls its own affairs.

The Jacksonian threshold for military action is high. Triggers for military action must demonstrate a direct threat to life, prosperity, or national honor by an aggressor. Further, populist leaders prefer to act only when they believe they can make a clear case to the public, before or after the action, that the U.S. is the aggrieved party. Jacksonians resist interventions intended to prevent illiberal behavior, especially if that behavior is not directed at U.S. interests. Once committed however, Jacksonians will condone aggressive, unilateralist military action, and rapid escalation to demonstrate U.S. prestige and resolve.

Populist leaders see themselves (and are seen by their followers) as the sole, legitimate representatives of the people against the elite. They advocate for their followers against the elite with rhetorical swagger, emotional appeal, and righteous indignation. They often respond to perceived personal slights to honor or reputation, directing colorful language at their antagonists. Nationalist policy choices trend toward economic protectionism, aggressive deregulation, and transactional security and foreign policy arrangements with a nationalistic bias. This leadership style, nationalist rhetoric, and policy choice can create perceptions of moral dilemma, which are troubling to the foreign policy elite. Any number of policy actions, from detentions on the U.S. border, trade wars with China, or disrespectful engagements with foreign leaders (such as referring to Kim Jong Un as “Rocket Man”), can trigger these concerns.

No nation can prosper in the complex international arena without established forums, processes, and norms to stabilize behavior and facilitate cooperation between nations. Many nationalist leaders acknowledge the U.S. cannot “go it alone,” recognizing the U.S. requires collective security and economic arrangements to sustain national prosperity and peace. Trump’s former National Security Advisor, LTG H.R. McMaster, and chief advisor and director of Trump’s national economic council, Gary Cohn, wrote in 2017 that “President Trump has a ‘clear-eyed view’ that the world is not a ‘global community’ but an arena where nations, nongovernmental actors, and businesses engage and compete for advantage.” In this arena, nationalists are less willing to

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trade sovereignty, leverage, or advantage to achieve the values-based objectives of liberal internationalists, who believe U.S. prosperity and security is a residual benefit of pursuing the common good.

Nationalists in powerful states are also less willing to shoulder the burden or suffer the criticism associated with forging collective consensus, preferring bilateral agreements where they can exert more leverage. Absent U.S. leadership over collective consensus within the western order, three possible futures emerge: a group of like-minded states assume co-equal burden with the U.S. to maintain the order; the status quo order is replaced by a more nationalist-mercantilist system, probably led by China; or some hybrid, where a weaker western liberal order competes with a nationalist-mercantilist system. If that hybrid-order emerges, the U.S. will likely operate in both systems, but lead neither.

The pursuit of national objectives, without a unifying national cultural norm, renders nationalist leaders susceptible to charges of racism and bigotry. Any policy advantaging or catering to the sensibilities of one segment of the electorate will inevitably disadvantage or offend another segment of the electorate. A populist leader’s idiosyncratic style, and the embodiment of the national identity in a single figure, renders the economic and security decisions they make susceptible to the influence of perceived slights to personal honor and national reputation. Under the Jacksonian tradition, it is good that the threshold for military action is high. Issues of honor and reputation are hard to operationalize into military objectives, and even harder to satisfy.

Failure: Blame It on Policy and Intervention Overreach

Selectorate theory holds that voters reward public policy success and punish failure. In order for the voting public to constrain failed policy, “political parties must provide voters with alternative platforms.”

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The military interventionist foreign policy of the United States enjoyed an uneven record during a honeymoon period between 1980 and 2000.37 The attacks of 2001 marked a definitive turning point for those successes. Since then, American military intervention, as measured by public dissatisfaction with outcomes, has failed. According to the Pew Research Center, a majority of U.S. adults believe U.S. military engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan were not worth the costs. This public sentiment extends further, to Syria, Libya, and beyond.38

Two overarching causes of failure during this period were foreign policy overreach, and the use of coercive military force to effect the engagement and enlargement agenda. Trump’s populist-nationalist movement was inspired in part by the prospect that he represents a clear alternative to globalist and interventionist foreign policies. Nationalists—and many realists—view the last four decades of U.S. foreign policy as a disaster. John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago coined the term “liberal hegemony” to label a foreign policy in pursuit of an assertive liberal internationalist ideology, seeking to impose individual rights, western values, and democracy around the globe. Mearsheimer argues that liberal hegemony’s underlying assumptions are fundamentally flawed and its aspirational objectives unachievable.39 Under this broad foreign policy agenda, the U.S. failed to achieve strategic objectives, while depleting national resources fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and combating Al Qaeda and Daesh across the globe. The U.S. further stretched its resources by participating in collective security arrangements around the globe.

During this same period, the U.S. has seen China’s economy soar, and rivals including China and Russia benefit from unfair practices associated with theft and coercion. The Trump administration even finds multilateral trade agreements among friends problematic. It walked away from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiated by

37. Examples of military intervention successes during this period include Grenada (1983), Panama (1989), Saudi Arabia/Iraq (1990–96), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (1990s). Military interventions widely considered failures (either immediately or over the longer-term) include Lebanon (1982–83) and Somalia (1993).
the Obama administration, renegotiated the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Mexico and Canada, and hopes to renegotiate the Transatlantic Trade Investment Partnership (TTIP) with the European Union. While the U.S. benefited from these treaties, there is a growing perception that the overall cost-benefit equation is tipping away from U.S. advantage.

An easier case to make is that U.S. foreign policy has been militarized, and that trend has failed to achieve the broader strategic political objectives set out for it. Chris Preble, a libertarian historian at the CATO Institute, contends that the availability of a standing U.S. Army facilitated the marginalization of trade, diplomacy, and cultural exchange in favor of military intervention. The Eisenhower, Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations all sought to make trade and diplomacy the hallmarks of their administrations, despite a standing army. It was only after the Cold War, and the pursuit of a more interventionist U.S. foreign policy, that American foreign policy became militarized. The second-order implication of a large standing army and an interventionist foreign policy is the expansion of a national security state and the commensurate expense of a much larger domestic government.40

Rosa Brooks of Georgetown University describes a vicious cycle leading to the militarization of U.S. foreign policy. This cycle is characterized by an increasing number and scope of military tasks, followed by increased defense budgets, and an even greater number of tasks perpetuated by a general lack of policy performance accountability. This cycle has resulted in the military becoming the institution presidents call on to project U.S. power. In addition to failures due to the mismatch between the military instrument and political objectives, Brooks highlights two additional problems caused by the militarization of foreign policy. First, it blurs the mission of the military as an instrument of war and an instrument to sustain peace. This tension places a strain on the military as it attempts to reconcile demands to achieve objectives in these two very different environments. Second, U.S. law and civilian values may be negatively impacted when the military’s leaders are asked to resolve the moral dilemmas of peace and war. While military leaders do this well in the security environments where they are asked to make such choices, Brooks’s concern is the transfer of those norms to

a peaceful domestic context.\textsuperscript{41}

The Jacksonian movement aligns with Mersheimer’s view that the foreign policy goals of liberal hegemony are probably not achievable. The Trump administration has diligently avoided using the military to project U.S. values around the globe, preferring to extend U.S. interests through economic and information instruments of national power. Critics have condemned his coercive trade practices and sometimes caustic rhetoric, but few charge him with expanding U.S. interests through intervention. The U.S. government expended life and national treasure for two decades in Iraq and Afghanistan but failed to achieve sustainable peace and security in those countries—much less advance a prosperous, democratic, and open market outcome.

Beyond these two wars, U.S. national honor and reputation have arguably suffered because of extensive global military engagements. Regardless of liberal hegemony’s philosophical rhetoric justifying interventionist policy, the U.S. is villainized, with attributions of ulterior motives, neo-colonialism, and heavy-handed domination. These ubiquitous charges are levied both domestically and internationally by friend and foe alike. Charges of negative motives play into populist-nationalist concerns over tarnished national legitimacy, honor, and pride. Nationalists do not appear to believe that projecting western values and expanding democratic governance globally are worth the effort.

The emerging narrative on the use of the military in foreign affairs today is strikingly different than the narrative after the end of the Cold War. Military involvement may be inevitable, as it is the most available and responsive tool at a president’s disposal. However, it will be used differently. Both senior civilian and military leaders are advocating for a strong military, focused on readiness for major combat operations against peer rival states. The approach rejects security agreements that require the U.S. to defend prosperous partner nations but supports cooperative agreements between capable nations willing to equally share the collective burdens of regional security.

The Jacksonian expectation is to remove the U.S. from existing nation-building operations and military interventions. Jacksonians might entertain the use of the military to impose security through the threat of lethal force, or to support other non-military operations. But to the extent current U.S. leadership will entertain security cooperation, se-

\textsuperscript{41} Rosa Brooks, \textit{How Everything Became War and the Military Became Everything: Tales from the Pentagon} (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016.)
curity force assistance, humanitarian, development, or peacekeeping operations, the adage “they need to want it more than we want it” is emerging as the guiding principle. However, when and where combat operations are required, quick escalation and decisive action are preferred. An “America first” military strategy of decisive, iterative strikes to achieve limited objectives (often described as whack-a-mole, cutting-the-lawn, or tending-the-garden) appears to be acceptable.

New Narrative: What Next, and What to Do?

Despite a great many uncertainties about the future, what appears sure is the rise of China. China’s rise renders projecting western values through military intervention, and policing the international system, even more impractical than during the alleged “unipolar moment.” Therefore, it is likely that U.S. foreign policy will probably continue to lean toward nationalist or realist ideology (in other words, assessing U.S. national interests in pragmatic versus ideological terms).

Globalization and the theory of free market competition are sound—as many states, including the U.S. and China, have benefited from both. However, despite a generally positive track record, collective approaches to economic competition have reached their practical limit when confronted by norm violations, corruption, and irreconcilable ideological differences among major economic blocks. The international order is only as strong or weak as member states’ willingness to manage it and sustain it through their support. That support starts with financial support and voluntary compliance with norms of cooperation. An increasingly important form of support is demonstrated collaborative leadership, along with a national willingness to enforce compliance and punish non-compliance with international norms.

The U.S. public increasingly supports a less robust, more minimalist foreign policy. In 2017, the Pew Center was reporting that “The public is evenly divided over whether the U.S. should be active in world affairs.” By 2019, a strong minority (40 percent) believed that U.S. nation-
al interests should be advanced even when allies strongly disagreed with the policy. This position is most strongly held by Republicans and independents who lean Republican, fully 57 percent of whom favor paying less attention to overseas problems. As a result, the U.S. is stepping back from a lead role in managing the order and enforcing its norms. Therefore, it is likely a dual track system of international order norms will emerge: one system will adhere to traditional western norms, while a second system will adopt more transactional nationalist-mercantilist norms.

The U.S. must operate within a collective international order to prosper. Therefore, the U.S. can be expected to advance its national interests in both systems. The U.S. will likely continue its pivot to Asia, engaging China more as a rival than a competitor. That may mean occasional collaborative agreements to cooperate among partner nations; but will more likely result in transactional bilateral agreements to challenge China’s aspirations for greater influence and control over Indo-Pacific nations and their economies. In other parts of the globe, the U.S. will cooperate with partners to pursue its national interests, adhering to the principles of a western-led, rules-based international order without committing to external governance. This autonomous cooperation is similar to how the U.S. adheres to the United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), without being a signatory. Whether the U.S. commitment to a nationalist and minimalist relationship with the international order will persist beyond the Trump administration remains to be seen.

The military-led interventionist foreign policy pursued by the U.S. since the end of the Cold War has failed to achieve political objectives. The trend to optimize the U.S. military for major combat operations against peer competitors, and punitive strikes to achieve shorter-term limited objectives, will likely continue. Current priorities, focused on material readiness for major combat operations, overlook or undervalue advantages derived from investment in ubiquitous, low-cost engagement opportunities through forward presence. No simple solutions exist, but engagement through forward posturing of the military seems a more prudent measure to assure allies and partners, and for the U.S. to compete effectively in the hypercompetitive peace environment,

or “Gray Zone.” Forward posturing strengthens relationships and ensures access, offering the nation greater flexibility and opportunities for shaping outcomes. Further, forward posturing creates military options for commanders and dilemmas for rivals in the event combat arises. However, even if the U.S. adopts forward posture engagement for pragmatic reasons, it is unlikely the U.S. military will lead foreign nation-building reform efforts anytime soon.

To the extent the U.S. continues to support security institutions of the international order, member nations will need to embrace greater burden-sharing challenges. Investing a greater percentage of GDP in defense is just a start. What matters is the delivery of regional military capabilities to enhance regional security. The U.S. public believes there is insufficient international burden-sharing to maintain the order. For example, NATO enjoys continued bipartisan favorable ratings among the U.S. public, but according an October 2017 survey by Pew Research Center, “almost half of Americans (48%) said NATO does not do enough to help solve world problems.”

NATO members must reassess their mission in the modern context and commit to achieving objectives without the U.S. in the lead. Partner nations in the Middle East and Asia must contribute more effectively to their own national defense. Further, partner nations of the Indo-Pacific must commit to greater regional security collaboration beyond their borders. These arrangements do not require direct challenges to China, nor formal alliances like NATO. However, partner nations in the Indo-Pacific must engage in meaningful regional security dialogue and demonstrate commitment to participate in collaborative military exercises. Sharing ports, facilities, logistics support, and intelligence during military exercises is a good start. Conducting multi-national military support to humanitarian and disaster relief operations is even better.

45. It is important to remember that presidents from Truman through Trump have expressed these burden-sharing narratives to a greater or lesser extent. What is unique about Trump’s message is the replacement of diplomatic language with New York real estate tycoon rhetoric.
Middle powers and western partners that believe globalization and the status quo international order are valuable to their national interests should demonstrate greater commitment to sustaining and managing its institutions. In time the U.S. may return to a leadership role, or it may choose to compete independently. The U.S. is still sufficiently powerful economically, militarily, and culturally to take its own narrowly defined nationalistic path if it wishes. If the U.S. pursues this idiosyncratic course, it will likely adhere to international order norms in a way that is similar to how it adheres to United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea—in other words, selectively. Alternatively, if nations do not find the benefits of collaboration worth the burden of order sustenance and norm enforcement, the world may well suffer a return to pre-Second World War power dynamics—when, in the famous words of Thucydides, “the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.”

Conclusion

American foreign policy under the 46th president will necessarily need to accommodate growing populist-nationalist trends in the U.S. Therefore, while the form and style of U.S. diplomacy and foreign policy may change, the emerging narrative will likely reflect an increasingly minimalist foreign policy, supported by a populist plurality that embraces a more nationalist view of U.S. interests.

As the U.S. role as manager and enforcer of the international order changes, so too will the status quo order change. Domestic politics in the U.S. is driving a new normal, a more minimalist supporting role in the international order. The Trump administration’s policies reflect a growing populist mistrust of political elite assumptions about globalization, the value of proselytizing western values and democracy, and leading the global enterprise of international order cooperation. The Trump administration reflects a foreign policy approach that asserts a more nationalist view of how to best pursue U.S. interests, through cooperative agreements with countries that are capable and willing to equally share the collective burdens of regional security. Dissonance between U.S. policy and behavior, and emerging narratives regarding the international order, confirm U.S. foreign policy is undergoing fundamental change and anticipates a new international order arrangement.