



# A Conservative's Prescriptive Policy Checklist: U.S. Foreign Policies in the Next Four Years to Shape a New World Order

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As Donald Trump prepares to enter the presidency, many observers at home and abroad seek to anticipate the outlines of his foreign policy. This essay has a different purpose. Based on the rigorous definition of vital U.S. national interests that follows immediately below,<sup>1</sup> it proposes a prescriptive checklist of U.S. policy steps that would strengthen the domestic base of American external actions; reinforce the U.S. alliance systems in Asia and Europe; meet the Chinese and Russian challenges, while improving the quality of diplomatic exchanges with Beijing and Moscow; reshape U.S. trade policy; gradually pivot from the Middle East to Asia (but not from Europe); maintain the nuclear agreement with Iran; and confront international terrorism more aggressively, but with minimal U.S. boots on the ground in ungoverned areas and without nation building. This list attempts to take into account the President-elect's public statements on foreign policy, but does not assume that all of them will be manifested after January 20. It rests squarely on the application of the Nixon/Kissinger national interest driven conceptual framework that refined American foreign policy five decades ago to current U.S. challenges and opportunities.

<sup>1</sup> The list of U.S. vital national interests draws on: Graham Allison and Robert Blackwill, *America's National Interests* (Commission on America's National Interests, 2000), <http://belfercenter.org/files/amernatinter.pdf>.

## Vital U.S. National Interests

Vital national interests are conditions that are strictly necessary to safeguard and enhance Americans' survival and well-being in a free and secure nation. Five vital U.S. national interests today are listed here, consistent with this austere definition:

1. Prevent the use and deter and reduce the threat of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, as well as catastrophic conventional terrorist or cyber attacks, against the United States or its military forces abroad;
2. Prevent the use and slow the global spread of nuclear weapons, secure nuclear weapons and materials, and reduce further proliferation of intermediate and long-range delivery systems for nuclear weapons;
3. Maintain a regional and global balance of power that promotes peace and stability through domestic American robustness, U.S. international primacy and the strengthening and defending U.S. alliance systems, including with Israel;
4. Prevent the emergence of hostile major powers or failed states on U.S. borders; and
5. Ensure the viability and stability of major global systems (including trade, financial markets, supplies of energy, and climate).

## U.S. Policy Prescriptions For The Period Ahead

### General

- Reestablish American Self-Confidence through a Sustained Display of Competence
- Rigorously Set U.S. External Priorities Based on a Hierarchy of National Interests and Restoring Stable Balances of Power
- Manifest an Instinct for International Restraint
- Reestablish through Sustained Performance U.S. International Strategic and Tactical Credibility/Reliability/Resolve with Allies, Friends, and Adversaries
- Identify and Implement Quick and Successful “Deals”
- Recognize that U.S. Economic Performance Is Crucial to the Above

## **U.S. Alliances/Partnerships**

- Substantially Increase U.S. Defense Spending
- Intensify U.S. Diplomatic/Military/Economic/Cyber Interaction with Treaty Allies in Asia and Europe
- Work to “Fix”/Renegotiate TPP or Its Major Elements to Ensure Greater U.S. Job Retention and to Enhance U.S. Asian Power Projection
- Increase U.S. Military/Naval Activities in the South China Sea and in Asia, Including Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) in Contested Space
- Intensify U.S. Diplomatic/Military/Economic/Cyber Interaction with Southeast Asia
- Intensify U.S. Diplomatic/Military/Economic/Cyber Interaction with India
  - » No Hyphenation with Pakistan
- Maintain Sanctions against Russia Until It Ends Its Interference in Eastern Ukraine
- Maintain New Obama Sanctions against Russia for Its Interference in U.S. Domestic Politics
- Transfer Only Small Arms and Shoulder-Fired Light Anti-Tank Weapons to Ukraine, None of Which Should Require U.S. or NATO Forces Present to Operate/No Heavy Weapons
- Push Increased NATO Defense Spending
- Deploy a U.S. Armored Division to Poland and a NATO Brigade to Each Baltic State with Attendant Air Force Assets
- Inform Russia: No Further NATO Enlargement
- Suspend BMD In Eastern Europe
- Work to Normalize Relations with Turkey/Erdogan
- Intensify U.S. Diplomatic/Economic/Cyber Interaction with the E.U. (Especially Germany)
- Restructure and Pass TTIP

- Stay out of U.K./E.U. Brexit Debate
  - » Strengthen U.S.-U.K. Ties/Revive Special Relationship
- Avoid Bilateral Rupture with Mexico
- Intensify/Integrate North American Economic Collaboration
  - » Tweak NAFTA to Secure More U.S. Manufacturing Jobs; Do Not Withdraw from It
  - » Increase Interagency Cooperation with Mexico to Coordinate Efforts against Drug and Firearms Trafficking, to Strengthen the Mexican Justice System, and to Promote Border Security

## **The Greater Middle East**

- Gradually Pivot from Middle East to Asia (but Not from Europe)
- Maintain Iran Nuclear Agreement as Currently Negotiated
  - » Intensify Verification Measures
  - » Maintain and Rigorously Enforce Sanctions against Iran for Non-Nuclear Activity, Including Support for Terrorist Groups
  - » Begin Discussions with Israel/U.S. Arab Partners on Post-Agreement Contingencies
  - » Establish Credible U.S. Military Options against Iran
  - » Intensify U.S. Efforts to Combat Iranian Hegemonic Activity in the Region
  - » Weaken Iran across the Middle East
- Deploy More U.S. Assets to Defeat ISIS in Iraq/Syria/Libya
- Stop Pronouncing that “Assad Must Go”
  - » Minimum U.S. Military Involvement in Syrian Civil War/Establish and Enforce No Fly Zones for Refugees over Designated Safe Havens
  - » End Support for Syrian Rebel Groups
- Strengthen U.S. Ties to Egypt/Gulf States
  - » Minimize U.S. Public Comment on Their Human Rights/Domestic Political Behavior
- Stay out of Sunni/Shia Divide

- Support Two-State Solution, but Minimum U.S. Diplomatic Effort
  - » Tie U.S. International Support for Israel to Efforts to Improve Palestinian Daily Life and to Curb Settlement Activities Outside the Blocs
  - » Do Not Move the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem
- Maintain Current Force Levels and Posture in Afghanistan but No Increase
- Pakistan: Maintain Economic Assistance/Reduce Military Assistance/Prepare for the Worst

## **Adversaries**

- Fight No More U.S. Land Wars For Foreseeable Future in Asia or Greater Middle East
- Engage and Contain China and Russia
  - » Conduct an Extended and Transparent Diplomatic Exploration with the Objective of Clarity with China and Russia Regarding National Interests/Strategic Purposes/Agreed Upon Principles (Not Narrow Short Term Issues), to Work to Produce Increased Compromise, Cooperation, and Restraint/Manage Inevitable Disagreements
  - » Weaken Their Geoeconomic Coercion Policies
- Maintain One China Policy
- Privately Accept No U.S. Military Solution to North Korean Nuclear/Missile Activities, Unless It Is Preparing to Attack the United States/U.S. Allies
  - » Strengthen Deterrence/Defense against North Korea
  - » Increase Sanctions and Take Treasury Actions to Isolate Banks Involved in Financing North Korea's Illicit Revenue Streams
  - » No Negotiation With Pyongyang
- Confront International Terrorism Aggressively
  - » But Minimal or No U.S. Boots on Ground in Ungoverned Areas
  - » No Nation Building

## **Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa**

- Rank Lower on National Interest Priorities except for Mexico
- Encourage Private Investment in Developing Economies in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa

## **Nuclear Proliferation**

- Hold the Traditional Line
- Try to Restore U.S. Mutual Nuclear Arms Control Treaties with Russia, with Commitments to Rigorously Enforce Them and to Secure Existing Nuclear Materials

## **U.S. Energy Exploitation and Climate**

- Expand U.S. Oil and Gas Exploration and Exports
- Implement Paris Agreement
  - » Pursue Research into Viable, Clean Alternatives to Fossil Fuels, Including Solar, Wind, and Nuclear Power

## **Cyber**

- Develop Enduring Doctrines and Operational Measures for Defense and Offense
- Rigorously Develop U.S. Cyber Capabilities, in Particular Defense and Infrastructural Resilience to Attack, and Coordinate Developments with the Private Sector

## **International Organizations**

- U.S. Lead in Reforming/Strengthening the United Nations and Global Financial Institutions (World Bank/IMF/etc.) to Promote U.S. National Interests

Even if these policy prescriptions are sensible and Donald Trump were to implement them all, which he decidedly will not do, the next several years of U.S. foreign policy will be laden with crises. With America's international position fundamentally weakened during the Obama presidency and given Trump's unorthodox approach to the major external issues facing the United States, both U.S. allies and adversaries will test the new President's strategic vision; the purpose, clarity and consistency of his policies; and the quality of his diplomacy. Moreover, international convulsions will inevitably erupt that are not currently at the top of the U.S. policy agenda. So get ready for surprises, both good and bad, and wish our new President well on behalf of a strict definition and defense of vital U.S. national interests.