



AMERICA and a WORLD ADRIFT

Foreign Policy and the 2024 U.S.
Presidential Election

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report examines the critical foreign policy issues shaping the 2024 U.S. presidential election landscape against America's evolving role in an increasingly complex global order. It analyzes the foreign policy stances of candidates Kamala Harris and Donald Trump, drawing from their past records and current positions. The study highlights key areas of contention, including strategic competition with China, ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, climate change, and trade policies. It explores how each candidate's approach might influence critical international relationships, security alliances, and responses to emerging global challenges. The report also considers the implications of the election outcome for U.S. allies and partners, particularly in Europe and the Indo-Pacific region. Special attention is given to the India-U.S. strategic partnership and its potential trajectory under different administration scenarios. By examining these issues, the report provides insights into the possible foreign policy directions of the next U.S. administration and their implications for global geopolitics, emphasizing the election's significance for American voters and the international community.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Introduction

The world is in a cauldron of uncertain power transition, tectonic shifts in new technologies, regional wars, and a host of post-pandemic transnational trends. After withdrawing from Afghanistan, the United States is technically relieved from foreign wars, but the reality is more complex. The war in Ukraine still occupies aid disbursement debates in Congress, and the brewing regional crisis in Middle East is attracting political attention in the American beltway and beyond. America's relative decline has been debated for a while, and the rise of a multipolar world has been assumed, even though the power asymmetry between the United States and the rest remains substantial.

The U.S. national security strategy has called China a pre-eminent challenger to America's global preeminence, particularly in the quest for a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific, pitting the two in a battle between 'democracies vs. autocracies.' The one question hovering in the minds of policymakers and political leaders worldwide is: What if Trump returns to the White House? The four disruptive years of Trump's presidency dramatically changed how Washington dealt with its allies and partners. While it is apparent that American voters choose their leaders based primarily on domestic issues, foreign policy does matter, even if peripherally. Given America's political, economic, and security footprints across the world, foreign policy counts in the U.S. presidential election more than in any other country's election.

This report examines the pivotal foreign policy issues shaping the 2024 U.S. presidential election landscape, set against the backdrop of America's evolving role in an increasingly complex global order. It offers a focused analysis of the two candidates' foreign policy stances, drawing from their past records, campaign promises, and current positions. The report highlights key areas of contention and illuminates the potential trajectories of American foreign policy under each prospective administration. The nuances of each candidate's approach and visions for America's global engagement might influence critical international relationships, security alliances, trade policies, and responses to emerging global challenges. Therefore, this report serves as a guide to understanding the foreign policy stakes of the 2024 election and their potential implications for the United States and the wider world.



America in a Complex World Order: From ‘America First’ to ‘Foreign Policy for the Middle Class’

The world is currently undergoing one of the most decisive and profound transitions in modern history since the end of World War II. The end of the Cold War significantly disrupted the global order with the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the bipolar era. It marked the triumph of U.S. led liberal capitalism, but the inevitable rise of new powers soon followed. This “rise of the rest” in the years ahead ended the era of unipolarity and unquestioned American predominance in international affairs.[1] Despite a brief attempt to encourage political reform in China by helping integrate its economy into the global financial system, the new millennium ushered in growing concerns about China. Just as Washington began seeing China as a strategic challenge, the 9/11 attacks occurred, marking the start of a defining era: the global war on terror. This led to large-scale interventions in Afghanistan and the misadventure in Iraq. These “forever wars”, along with the financial recession of 2008, will shape U.S. strategy for years to come.

Beginning around the end of Obama’s first term and gaining momentum during his second term, America’s Rebalancing Strategy towards the Asia-Pacific heralded a defining strategic shift in U.S. foreign policy, becoming the predecessor to its Indo-Pacific strategy. This initiated a new era for America’s alliances and partnerships in Asia, leading to some concern among European partners. They needed reassurance that the focus on Asia would not come at the expense of transatlantic relations. [2] Starting in 2011, a wave of revolution and change began to shape America’s engagement with the Arab world during the anti-establishment revolts known as the Arab Spring. As American military and civilian resources became tied up in foreign lands, war fatigue rose among the American public. The calls for withdrawal from costly foreign wars, maintaining frugality while exercising power abroad, and nation building at home began getting louder.[3] Despite seismic differences in the presidential personalities of Barack Obama and Donald Trump, the end of the Obama era laid the groundwork for Trump’s louder and hyperbolic version of the “America First Strategy”. However, Trump’s undiplomatic bravado created wide schisms between Washington and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies.[4]

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The sharper strategic competition with China in the Indo-Pacific, the imminent withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Faustian deal with Taliban, plus the challenges of dealing with Putin’s Russia in Europe revealed more continuity than dramatic shifts in U.S. foreign policy. When Biden promised to restore America’s leadership and reset foreign relationships, it was primarily aimed at reassuring allies who were unsettled by Trump’s presidential style.

Biden’s call for an American foreign policy for the middle class sought to invent a new narrative of tempering the anger of Americans who felt neglected during prolonged foreign wars.[5] The Democratic Party Platform 2024, for instance, contended that “domestic challenges” were not disconnected from “global ones” and that President Biden understood “that the two go hand-in-hand, and that leading abroad means being strong and

resilient at home.” Likewise, the Republican Party Platform 2024 committed to “rebalancing Trade, securing Strategic Independence, and revitalizing manufacturing” promising to “build a Strong, Self-reliant, and Prosperous America.”[6]

The structural challenges that U.S. foreign policy and national security planners identified with a rising and assertive China remain unchanged. Biden’s National Security Strategy highlighted that “the post-Cold War era is definitively over and a competition is underway between the major powers to shape what comes next.” The Biden administration framed the strategic competition between U.S. and China as “democracies vs autocracies” and saw China as the only country with both the capability and intention to challenge America’s primacy in the international system.[7] The foreign and national security dynamics in the United States fluctuates between the desire to engage more internationally and the need to focus on domestic issues, with the reality of policymaking existing somewhere in between.[8]

The new president will face overwhelming structural challenges from day one, including managing the significant threat from China, managing America’s new terms of engagements with allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific, recalibrating ties with NATO partners amid the Ukraine war, and walking the minefields of Middle East, as a crisis manager. Moreover, how the new president navigates the global economy while delivering on the promise of improving American lives will define the contours of “American foreign policy for the middle class” or “America First”.

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Who’s Afraid of a Trump 2.0? The Consequence for Allies and Partners

Compared to America’s allies and partners in Asia, NATO allies in Europe seem most concerned and anxious of a probable Trump sequel in the White House. While Trump’s call for burden sharing and for European allies to contribute more towards the region’s defense precedes his presidency, his style and approach of threatening to withdraw from NATO and a boorish defense of “America First” left a bad taste in trans-Atlantic relationship.[9] Speaking at a press conference, after the NATO Summit in 2018, President Trump commented, “I think NATO is a very important — probably the greatest ever done. But the United States was paying for anywhere from 70 to 90 percent of it, depending on the way you calculate. That’s not fair to the United States.”[10]

At the 75th Anniversary of the NATO in July this year, President Biden speaking of burden sharing, took a very different tone. “In the year 2020, the year I was — the year I was elected president, only nine NATO Allies were spending 2 percent of their defense — GDP on defense.” In 2024, “23 will spend at least 2 percent,” while “some will spend more than that,” he said. “And the remaining countries that have not yet reached that milestone will get there soon.” However, the past of Trump’s presidency and the possibility of his return to office weighed on the minds of America’s allies. Trump’s election hyperboles have further fueled rising concerns among European countries, making European leaders wonder if they could make NATO Trump-proof. In February, during an election rally in South Carolina, Trump recalled a conversation, during

his presidential tenure, with a European leader, when he warned that the U.S. “would not protect” them, and “would encourage” Russia “to do whatever the hell they want” in case the European country did not “pay” for their defense.[11] The Republican Party Platform 2024 says, “Republicans will strengthen Alliances by ensuring that our Allies must meet their obligations to invest in our Common Defense and by restoring Peace to Europe.”[12]

After President Biden withdrew from the race, Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski, echoing a broader strategic perception in Europe, warned that America’s European allies might need to prepare for a long-term trend in U.S. foreign policy that would direct strategic premium to Asia. He hinted at a new era in transatlantic relationship that would require European countries to take on more responsibility for their collective defense, irrespective of who wins the November election.[13] Vice President Kamala Harris, the presidential nominee of the Democratic Party, is clearly poised to follow President Biden’s path, promising more readiness to support

NATO and strengthen alliance with Europe in the face of Russian aggression in Ukraine. During the Biden-Harris administration, NATO saw two new members, in Finland and Sweden. Vice President Harris speaking at the Munich Security Conference in 2022, was emphatic in support of the NATO alliance, and aimed to reassure allies, saying, “And today, let me be clear: America’s commitment to Article 5 is ironclad. This commitment is sacrosanct to me, to President Biden, and to our entire nation.”[14]

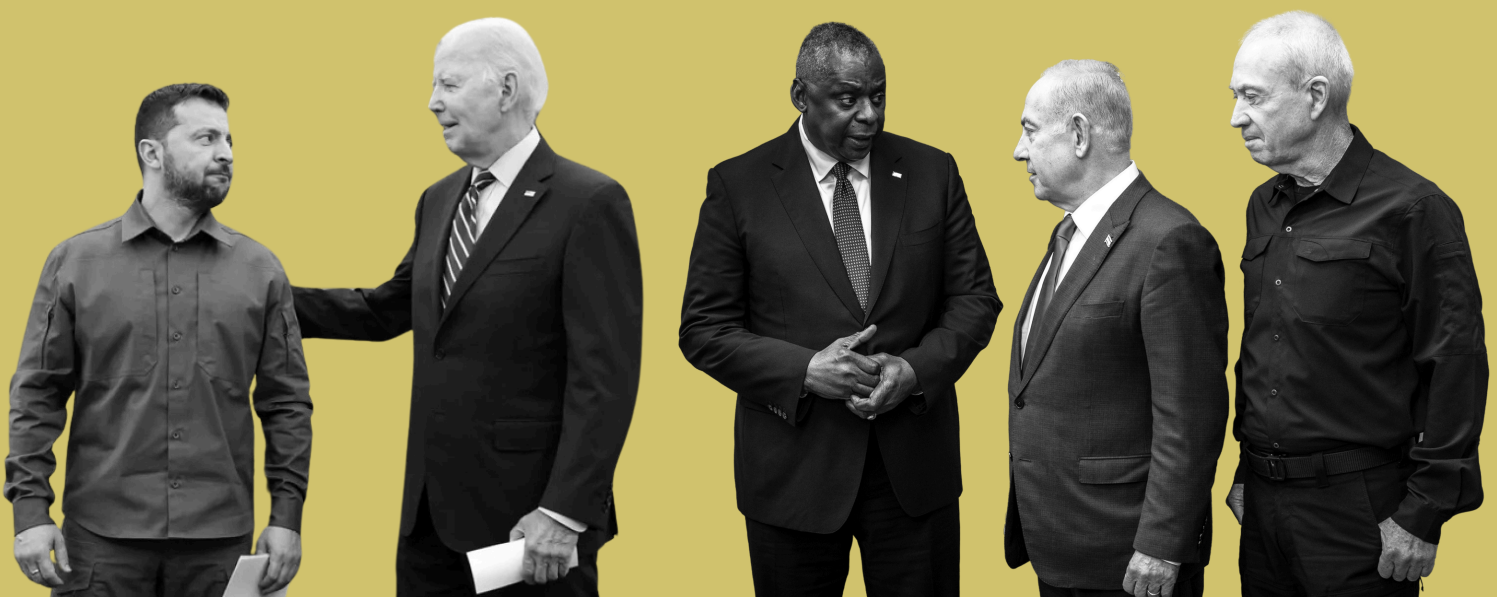
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The Specter of Foreign Wars in Election: Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Israel-Hamas

In the recent past, America's fatigue with foreign wars has played a critical role in influencing voting patterns. The death of American soldiers and the huge expenditure incurred in "forever wars" have often increased calls for retrenchment and refocus on issues of America's domestic well-being. Recently, both Republicans and Democrats have dueled over the nature of the withdrawal from Afghanistan. While Republicans have accused the Biden administration of a hasty and ill-planned exit, the Democrats have alleged the Trump administration of cutting a deal with the Taliban without the Afghan government, leaving very little legroom for the U.S. in Afghanistan.[15] Two regional wars have yet again become potent issues for the 2024 election: the war in Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas war affecting wider Middle East. Though they do not involve American boots on the ground, substantial aid and assistance disbursed from the U.S. has attracted political attention in an election season. While U.S. assistance to Ukraine's war efforts remains a divisive issue between political parties, the Israel-Hamas war has sparked protests that have spread beyond Washington, reaching university campuses across the country.

At this year's NATO summit, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy commented that the situation in Ukraine could not wait for the U.S. election to conclude. While talking to Fox News, he said, "I hope that if the people of America will elect President Trump, I hope that his policy with Ukraine will not change" and that the U.S. "will never go out from NATO." [16] The Biden administration has remained steadfast in supporting the war efforts in Ukraine against Russia, signing billions of dollars in support for Ukraine, despite partisan challenges in the U.S. Congress.[17] During his campaign, Trump has frequently boasted that he could end the Ukraine war by brokering a peace deal within 24 hours if he returns to the White House, though he has not provided details on how he would negotiate with Presidents Putin and Zelenskyy. On September 27, during a press conference after their meeting in New York, Trump, standing beside Zelenskyy, bragged of "good relations" with both leaders. Zelenskyy interjected, saying, "I hope we have more good relations." Trump responded, "oh I see, yeah, but you know it takes two to tango." [18] Trump's opponent, Harris, having served as Biden's deputy for four years, is expected to maintain support for Ukraine's war efforts against Russia ("as long as it takes") and address the looming threats that Washington believes Putin's Russia poses to the rest of Europe if left unchecked. Harris has been at the forefront of coordinating with Western allies to impose biting sanctions on Russia and bolster the war effort in Ukraine.[19]



Harris believes a two-state solution as a long-term way out of the years old Israeli-Palestinian conflict. She supports Israel's right to self-defense and U.S. military aid to Israel but, at the same time, has clearly condemned the heavy toll to civilian lives on the Palestinian side. She has vouched for an urgent ceasefire deal between the warring parties, and the release of hostages, while also expressing the need for the Israeli government to prevent civilian casualties and allow more aid to Gaza. During the Harris-Trump presidential debate conducted by ABC News, Harris retorted

sharply when Trump said, "She hates Israel. If she's president, I believe that Israel will not exist within two years from now." "That's absolutely not true," replied Harris. "I have my entire career and life supported Israel and the Israeli people. He knows that." [20] Harris had also supported the Trump era Abraham Accords that aimed at normalizing Israel's relations with Arab countries. [21] Trump has shown more unquestioned support for Israel and calls it a "cherished ally". During his presidency, he moved the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, recognizing the latter as Israel's capital. The Abraham Accords marked a significant shift in Middle East inter-state equations under Trump's supervision. In January 2020, he unveiled what he called a "win-win" Middle East peace plan, though it was ultimately rejected by the Palestinians. [22] During his debate with Harris, Trump referring to the challenges from Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, and Houthis, said, "Look at what's going on in the Middle East. This would have never happened. I will get that settled and fast." [23]

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Election Security and Foreign Interference

Reports of deep Russian interference during the 2016 election continue to haunt election security and safety measures in the United States. The list of allegations against Russia runs extremely long, including cyber-attacks and attempts on the Democratic National Committee and the Republican National Committee. The Russian playbook also included, among others, releasing propaganda on social media channels, staging rallies in American states, and even arranging meetings with members of the Trump campaign team. [24]

The threat of foreign interference looms large in the 2024 election as well, most prominently from Russia, but U.S. officials have also accused China of wrongdoing. The Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community 2024 noted that China "may attempt to influence the U.S. elections in 2024 at some level because of its desire to sideline critics of China and magnify U.S. societal divisions." [25] Reports point to Chinese entities employing tactics from the Russian playbook, fueling societal divisions, spreading conspiracy theories, and targeting candidates and parties more intensely through fake online accounts, which include masquerading as partisan American citizens. [26]

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On September 9, Biden's White House sought to extend the provisions of "the national emergency with respect to the threat of foreign interference in or undermining public confidence in United States elections" passed earlier on September 12, 2018. The vulnerabilities, scope, and intensity of the threats of foreign interference in U.S. elections have grown with "the proliferation of digital devices and internet-based communications," the White House statement said.[27] The Russian government-controlled media outlet RT, as well as pro-Iranian websites, have been under the scanner of U.S. government agencies for spreading propaganda and disinformation. More recently, the Biden administration has categorically accused RT of being an arm of Russia's intelligence apparatus and carrying out information warfare operations around the world, leading social media giant Meta to ban RT on all its apps globally.[28]

The Department of State, in coordination with the Department of the Treasury and other government agencies, is also taking actions "to hinder malicious actors from using Kremlin-supported media as a cover to conduct covert influence activities that target the U.S. elections in 2024." They are "introducing a new visa restriction policy, making Foreign Missions Act determinations, and announcing a \$10 million Rewards for Justice offer." [29] In the Aftermath of Russia's alleged interference in the 2016 election, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) prioritized safeguarding physical and virtual assets of the U.S. election process, which was part of the nation's critical infrastructure. DHS's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) is at the center of "mobilizing more than ever before to help state and local election officials bolster election infrastructure against threats." [30]

The China Challenge and the Indo-Pacific Geopolitics

During a debate in June this year with then-presumptive Democratic nominee Joe Biden, Trump referred to Biden as "the Manchurian Candidate," accusing the sitting president of being "paid by China." [31] During his debate with Kamala Harris, Trump, while talking of tariffs on Chinese cars, alleged, "Biden doesn't go after people because supposedly China paid him millions of dollars. He's afraid to do it." Similarly, Harris attacked Trump's record on China, saying that he had "invited trade wars" and that under Donald Trump's presidency, America sold "chips to China to help them improve and modernize their military." [32]

Despite such below-the-belt attacks on each other, there is a broad bipartisan consensus on the long-term threats to the future of U.S. global primacy by China's assertive rise. Washington and Beijing stand at a critical juncture in negotiating the future course of their bilateral relationship and its broader implications. The competition is pitched as a contest between "democracies vs autocracies," with both sides accusing the other of endangering peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.[33] Both presidential nominees view China as the most critical foreign policy challenge, though they accuse each other of

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failing to execute a robust American response. The China challenge and the perception that China has the capability and intention to pose long-term challenges to America's primacy will continue no matter who wins in November. As a 2024 contender, Trump has doubled down on his economic framing of the China challenge. He is convinced that tariffs targeted at China have made America more competitive - a strategy

Biden continued, which he plans to reinforce if he returns to power. Like in the case of NATO and Russia, Trump has called for Taiwan to pay for America's security cover vis-à-vis China, saying, "You know, we're no different than an insurance company."^[34]

Trade, technology, and Taiwan continue to dominate high-level communication between the two countries. The U.S. accuses China of unfair trade practices, imposes high tariffs, and restricts Chinese high-tech products with national security implications. The two countries continue to exchange redlines and warnings on Taiwan's sovereignty and freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific waters while recognizing high-level

military-to-military communication as essential to prevent unintended confrontations and miscalculations.^[35] Both parties commonly use the claim that China engages in unfair economic practices and steals intellectual property as a point of attack in their campaigns. How to "de-risk" U.S.-China relations without "de-coupling" will remain a pivot point of Washington's China policy, perhaps in different ways, depending on who wins.

Amidst the U.S. election season, the South China Sea has witnessed volatile maritime standoffs between China and the Philippines. A U.S. mid-range missile system in the region has been a subject of diatribe, with Beijing calling for its removal, while Washington and Manila are showing no immediate plans to do so. Moreover, the question of American leadership in building quality infrastructure with transparent financing models in the Indo-Pacific region to counter China's infamous Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) will also be a priority in the next administration. However, a Trump presidency might demand more burden-sharing from other allies and regional partners.^[36]

American allies and new partners keenly watch the uncertain U.S.-China power dynamics. Therefore, in a bid to reassure allies and partners, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, and US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin jointly wrote an op-ed in The Washington Post in August,

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contending that Biden's Indo-Pacific strategy had upgraded the old "hub and spoke" alliance to a new model of integrated and interconnected network of partnerships.[37] Moreover, the growing alliance between Russia and China and their anti-West postures, including Moscow's support for China's position on Taiwan and joint opposition to the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, remain a potent strategic challenge for the United States, which faces a new sort of two-front Cold War. Washington has also called out China's support for Russia's defense industrial base, which has substantial repercussions for the Ukraine war.[38]

If he wins, Trump will be in a different geopolitical environment since he last met President Putin and President Xi Jinping. The Ukraine war has now lasted over two years, deepening U.S.-Russia hostility, while U.S.-China tensions have escalated in recent years. In his campaign speeches, Trump appears to believe he can take advantage of the differences between China and Russia to create a rift in their growing alliance.[39] It is hard to say if he will succeed in this strategic endeavor.

Trade and Protectionism

The U.S.-China geopolitical rivalry has significantly shaped America's trade policy, with both candidates concentrating their criticisms on addressing China's "unfair" economic practices and protecting American workers and industries. From the Trump-era trade war to the Biden-era restrictions on high-tech products, the U.S.-China economic tit-for-tat will also remain the pivot point for the next presidency. One significant difference

between a Trump and Harris presidency could be how Harris prioritizes climate and environmental issues while negotiating trade deals. Harris has a history of rejecting trade deals that she finds incognizant of climate and environmental concerns. As a senator, Harris opposed the Obama-era Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which the Trump administration later withdrew from, and she also opposed the Trump-era U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), an updated version of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).[40]

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One significant difference between a Trump and Harris presidency could be how Harris prioritizes climate and environmental issues while negotiating trade deals.

While coming down hard on known adversaries of the United States through its trade policy, the Biden-Harris administration has taken a multilateral outlook in dealing with allies and partners. For instance, they enacted the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) in 2022, which contained billions of dollars of federal grants, loans, and tax incentives for clean energy and climate action, while prohibiting American companies from sourcing critical minerals from "foreign entities of concern", including China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran. The administration's Chips and Sciences Act passed the same year aimed to revitalize "domestic manufacturing, create good-paying American jobs, strengthen American supply chains, and accelerate the industries of the future." It provided billions of dollars of funds for "American semiconductor research, development, manufacturing, and workforce development". It simultaneously applied strong restrictions on "China and other countries of concern" accessing high-tech products, particularly those with national security implications.[41]

Throughout his election campaign, Trump has consistently indicated that he would pursue a trade policy much more aggressive than the one seen during his previous presidency if he were reelected. While the primary target of tariffs would still be China, similar to Harris's campaign, a Trump 2.0 administration would

likely be more dismissive of multilateralism, focusing on an aggressive approach to trade and tariffs, regardless of allies or adversaries. During his presidency and more recently, Trump has frequently labeled India as a “very big abuser” of tariffs.

Under Trump's presidency, the future of the multilateral Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) is on the line, and its implications for trade dynamics, supply chains, clean economy, and fair economy with other member countries will be essential to monitor closely.

[43] Trump promises new restrictions on Chinese ownership of assets in the U.S., restricting U.S. investments in China, bans on imports from China, including electronics, steel, and pharmaceuticals, and calls for “stiff penalties on China and all other nations” that were “abusing” America. His plan includes a notorious “universal baseline tariff” covering most imported goods. When quizzed about his proposition to impose more than 60% tariff on all Chinese imports, he said, “No, I would say maybe it’s going to be more than that.”[43]

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Most trade analysts have pointed out that high tariffs are inflationary and lead to increased retaliatory practices.[44] Trump primarily projects America as a victim of the global trading system, blaming foreign countries for flooding the American market, hurting American manufacturing industries, and, most of all, illegal immigrants for stealing American jobs. According to the Republican Party platform 2024, a Trump presidency alone can fix the China problem in America’s trade policy and make the American economy competitive again. It promises to “revoke China's Most Favored Nation status” called Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR). There is a growing political consensus in America, including Kamala Harris, that the World Trade Organization (WTO) needs reform to align with the new structural realities of the global economy. However, Trump has intensified this debate by calling the WTO a “disaster” and threatening to withdraw from it, accusing countries like China of manipulating the system.[45]



Climate, Environment, and Green Transition

Trump and Harris differ significantly on climate change, environmental sustainability, and the green transition. Trump’s withdrawal from the multi-nation Paris Agreement became a high point of his climate policy. In contrast, as Vice President, Harris has actively worked to restore the U.S. commitment to global efforts to reduce emissions, protect the environment, and promote greener energy consumption. However, as the campaign progresses, several contradictions and complexities have emerged. While the Biden-Harris administration projects itself as a champion of green energy, U.S. domestic oil and gas production has reached historic heights. Some are calling out Harris for being soft on the fracking industry during her debate with Trump and missing an opportunity to project herself as a champion of green energy. In contrast, others call her the best bet for leading America’s fight against the climate crisis. Either way, the President has limited power to ban fracking even on federal lands, not to mention private properties, and the decision eventually ends in Congress.[46]

Global trade, new technologies, and growth are now linked to green transition efforts. Everything from building infrastructure to developing new industries has a climate component. The next presidency will have to navigate the politics and economics of electric vehicles, for instance, in terms of domestic production and restrictions on imports from foreign countries. Transitioning to renewable energy sources, reducing carbon footprints, and preparing the workforce for the future while managing the ongoing dominance of fossil fuels will be key priorities in the new presidency’s policymaking. Trump’s call for “drill, baby drill” and unhindered expansion of domestic fossil fuel production and disdain for multilateral climate efforts casts a looming shadow on this issue. Trump plans to rescind major Biden-era laws that substantially impact climate and environment, such as the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which provides tax credits and subsidies for clean energy products. A Trump presidency promises to lift “restrictions” on American energy production and “unleash” energy production from all sources.[47] A Trump 2.0 will come with a more uncertain playbook on multilateral exchanges, including at the United Nations, multi-nation climate summits and arrangements, plus initiatives in groupings like the G20, G7, and Quad.

How US crude oil production increased over 3 presidencies

Each recent president has ended his term with higher US crude oil production levels than his predecessor. Today, the U.S. is the world’s largest oil producer.

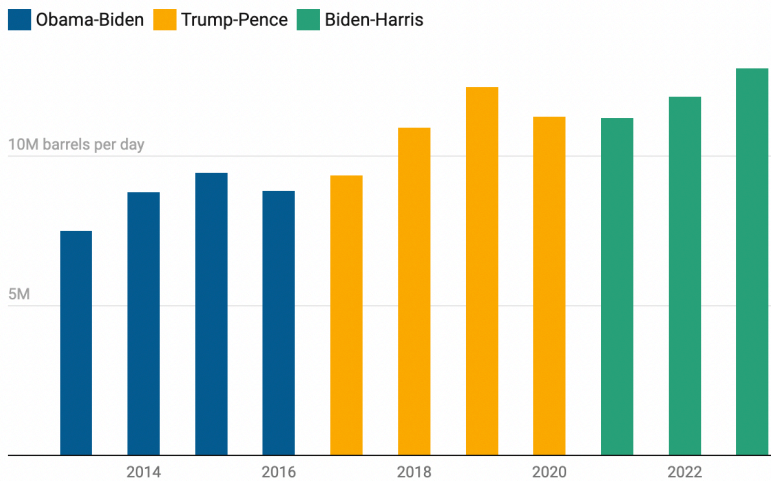


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Is the India-U.S. Partnership Election Proof?

It is a well-established understanding that the India-U.S. strategic partnership enjoys bipartisan support in the United States and will continue to progress positively, regardless of leadership changes. Amid an uncertain world, Washington and Delhi have managed to stitch together a strategic partnership growing stronger by the day despite occasional hiccups. For instance, the recent diplomatic tension regarding the alleged conspiracy by an Indian national against Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, the leader of a U.S.-based Khalistani separatist group and a U.S. citizen, is being handled soberly by both sides, ensuring that it does not disrupt the strategic partnership.[48]

The strategic imperative of this relationship has created a conducive environment for a rapidly burgeoning defense and security cooperation, with both sides ready to walk the talk on defense co-development and co-production. Overarching agreements like the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) show a multi-sectoral and multi-agency partnership cutting across commercial and military technologies that will shape the security and economics of the 21st century.[49] From maritime to outer space and cyberspace, from bilateral to multilateral engagements, Washington perhaps maintains and envisions an alignment with Delhi like no country beyond its closer set of traditional allies.

However, the U.S. is a global power with influence and interests worldwide. On the other hand, India is an Asian power with aspirations to become an independent and vital force in international affairs. Consequently, U.S. foreign policy decisions not focused on India will still have secondary effects that may impact Delhi positively or negatively. For instance, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, America's leadership of NATO, support for Ukraine war efforts, and its adversarial relationship with Russia all influence India's delicate dynamics with Moscow and Kyiv. These factors affect the trajectory of India-U.S. relations, leading to divergent expectations.[50] Moreover, the United States and India are confronting the China challenge together while carrying out their respective policies of 'de-risking' without 'de-coupling.' For India, China is a proximate power staking claims on its territory and engaging in territorial transgressions, including its claim on the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh as China's South Tibet or Zangnan. The U.S.-China great power rivalry is global and has the consequence of reshaping the international system.

Thus, how Washington and Delhi manage their differences and interdependencies with China will shape the convergences and divergences in what both sides can expect from each other. [51] For instance, in Delhi, there has always been a lurking concern about a U.S.-China power condominium, also referred to as G2, and in Washington, questions persist about the extent to which India can go along with the U.S. against China beyond its imminent security concerns.[52]

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As Washington navigates South Asia after two decades of shaping its regional policy through the Afghanistan lens, the trajectory of U.S. strategy in India's immediate neighborhood is still evolving. The widespread belief of American agencies' involvement in the ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in Bangladesh and the brewing crisis has not rattled Washington or Delhi.[53] However, both sides have significant work ahead to prevent these perceptions of mistrust and suspicion from taking hold in public

discourse and, more dangerously, in social media narratives. Lastly, new presidencies and emerging crises will continue to present risks and opportunities for Washington and Delhi to advance their bilateral arrangements and align their strategies on multilateral platforms as the world rapidly evolves into a new landscape of trade, technology, and climate issues.[54]

Conclusion

The 2024 U.S. presidential election occurs at a critical juncture in global affairs, and the outcome is poised to significantly shape America's role on the world stage. Both Kamala Harris and Donald Trump present distinct visions for U.S. foreign policy, reflecting broader debates about America's global engagement in an era of strategic competition with China, ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, and transnational challenges like climate change.

While there is bipartisan consensus on certain issues, such as China's strategic challenge, the candidates differ markedly in their approaches to international cooperation, trade, and America's relationships with allies. A Harris presidency would likely continue many of the Biden administration's policies, emphasizing multilateral engagement and a rules-based international order. In contrast, a second Trump term promises a more unilateral and transactional approach to foreign affairs, potentially reshaping longstanding alliances and trade relationships.

Regardless of the election's outcome, the next administration will face complex foreign policy challenges from day one. These include managing an increasingly assertive China, recalibrating relationships with European and Indo-Pacific allies, addressing ongoing conflicts, and balancing domestic economic concerns with global engagement. The India-U.S. strategic partnership, while generally stable, may also face new opportunities and challenges depending on the election results.

As American voters prepare to make their choice, the global community watches with keen interest. The 2024 election will not only determine the direction of U.S. foreign policy but also significantly influence the shape of the international order in the years to come. While domestic issues often dominate electoral politics, the global ramifications of this election underscore the continued importance of American leadership in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

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