

Research Paper

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# US Election Note: Defence Policy After 2016

## Summary

- Defence policy has taken centre stage in what has proven to be one of the most contentious and polarizing US presidential election campaigns in history. The stakes are high given today's increasingly complex international security landscape, and each candidate offers different futures for the United States in terms of defence policy.
- Americans have conflicting views on US engagement overseas, which has made it difficult to propose policies regarding the country's role in the world. While they generally support US 'leadership', policy proposals that advocate US retrenchment have also resonated among them.
- Hillary Clinton advocates robust American engagement overseas. She supports traditional alliances like NATO, while taking a firm line on Russia. She also supports an increased role for the United States in eradicating the threat of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and in stabilizing Syria and the broader Middle East.
- Donald Trump has proposed contradictory defence goals. He pledges to destroy ISIS, but voices scepticism over US military engagement. He also has called for significantly increasing the size of the military, voiced frustration with what he sees as the failure of NATO and European allies to provide for their own defence, and praised international leaders (Russia's President Vladimir Putin, for example) who are viewed by some as adversaries of the United States.

## Introduction

For over a year, the United States has been embroiled in one of the most contentious and polarizing presidential election campaigns in recent history. The candidates have provoked strains of recently dormant nativism among Americans, and the question of the country's role in the world features centrally in their platforms. The next president will inherit a long list of foreign policy challenges at a time when Americans are increasingly sceptical about engagement abroad. From an unstable Middle East, a resurgent Russia and an increasingly assertive China to a Europe cracking under internal and external pressures, the next president will face tough choices about how and when to apply the various instruments of US power. Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, the respective Democratic and Republican nominees, have contrasting views on how to employ the US defence toolkit, how best to balance hard and soft power, and the future of American leadership on the world stage. This paper highlights and analyses those differences, with the goal of helping foreign and domestic audiences manage their expectations in advance of the presidential election in November.

## Background

Depending on who you ask, the defence policy of President Barack Obama has been characterized by pragmatism, engagement and hints of realism, or by retrenchment, weakness and deliberate restraint to the detriment of US credibility. Obama has described himself as a realist and an internationalist. He has voiced strong support for international institutions underpinning the United States' security and prosperity, while stressing the limits of American power in resolving complex problems abroad.<sup>1</sup> He entered the Oval Office set on deepening relationships with allies and extending a hand to potential partners. He also promised to untangle the United States from its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, to avoid future wars, and to reverse some of the previous administration's counterterrorism policies. But many external forces and circumstances have shaped the pursuit of these goals in unforeseen ways.

Over the last decade, the depth of US defence engagement abroad has varied. In general, three different approaches have characterized the US response to security dilemmas in this period: heavy engagement, as seen in the protracted counter-insurgency ground wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; limited engagement through the use of air power, local forces and multinational institutions, as seen in Libya; and, until 2014, a cautious and relatively hands-off approach to avoid getting mired in conflicts that may not directly implicate US security interests or cannot be easily solved by US military intervention, as seen with the conflicts in Syria and eastern Ukraine. While each approach has its unique rationale, none has succeeded in resolving the conflict in question. The conflicts in Afghanistan, Libya and Syria continue to rage, and the conflict in eastern Ukraine has yet to subside. This raises questions as to the success and sustainability of current US policy in these various theatres.

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<sup>1</sup> Goldberg, J. (2016), 'The Obama Doctrine', *Atlantic*, April 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

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In addition to reducing the US military footprint abroad, and after campaigning on a promise to reform controversial intelligence-gathering practices, President Obama attempted early on to roll back some of the counterterrorism practices of the George W. Bush administration. During his first 100 days in office, he signed executive orders that banned waterboarding and other legally questionable interrogation techniques.<sup>2</sup> In other areas, though, such as the closure of Guantanamo Bay, progress has been elusive thanks in no small part to partisan disagreements about how to try detainees or where to deport them to. Simultaneously, and even more so than President Bush, President Obama has continued to rely heavily on drones in an attempt to target foreign terrorists with more surgical precision and as limited a footprint as possible.<sup>3</sup>

Besides myriad complex events overseas, there are also domestic challenges to a comprehensive defence policy. Congress has failed every year since 2009 to pass a budget resolution, which has resulted in the government being funded with stopgap measures that make long-term defence planning difficult. Partisan rancour over the debt ceiling led to the enactment of the Budget Control Act of 2011, which imposed dramatic spending cuts and reduced defence outlays.<sup>4</sup> There is now growing bipartisan consensus that the act has hindered the ability to adequately address security challenges, suggesting that the defence budget could begin to grow again on a predictable basis in the coming years.<sup>5</sup>

Decisions made over the last decade have laid the groundwork for the next president, and many of the defence challenges faced by the current administration could persist indefinitely. There is no sign of the conflicts in the Middle East abating, Russia continues to intimidate its neighbours, there is growing friction in the Asia-Pacific, domestic politics are perhaps more heated than ever, and the threat of terrorism will continue to be a central focus. All of this combines with a US public that largely believes the country should turn inward to focus on its own issues and that is increasingly wary of overusing US defence tools abroad.<sup>6</sup> In short, the next president must be ready to face many simultaneous challenges overseas and at home.

## Policy positions

### *Hillary Clinton*

Hillary Clinton has more foreign policy experience than any candidate for the presidency in recent years. As secretary of state, she played an active role in shaping many of the first Obama administration's initiatives, earning praise from Secretary of Defense Robert Gates – who served in various Republican administrations as well as Obama's – as 'idealistic but pragmatic'.<sup>7</sup> Since

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<sup>2</sup> White House (2009), 'Executive Order 13491 – Ensuring Lawful Interrogations', 22 January 2009, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/EnsuringLawfulInterrogations](https://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/EnsuringLawfulInterrogations) (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Byman, D. L. (2013), 'Why Drones Work: the Case for Washington's Weapon of Choice', Brookings Institution, 17 June 2013, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2013/06/17-drones-obama-weapon-choice-us-counterterrorism-byman> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>4</sup> US Congressional Budget Office (2015), *The 2015 Long-Term Budget Outlook*, ch. 4, <https://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/114th-congress-2015-2016/reports/50250/50250-breakout-Chapter4.pdf> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Flournoy, M. and Edelman, E. (2014), 'Cuts to Defense Spending Are Hurting Our National Security', *Washington Post*, 19 September 2014, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/cuts-to-us-military-spending-are-hurting-our-national-security/2014/09/18/6db9600c-3abf-11e4-9c9f-ebb47272e40e\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/cuts-to-us-military-spending-are-hurting-our-national-security/2014/09/18/6db9600c-3abf-11e4-9c9f-ebb47272e40e_story.html) (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Pew Research Center (2016), *Public Uncertain, Divided Over America's Place in the World*, 5 May 2016, <http://www.people-press.org/files/2016/05/05-05-2016-Foreign-policy-APW-release.pdf> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Gates, R. (2014), *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

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announcing her presidential bid in 2015, Clinton has delivered addresses outlining many of her views on global challenges, but she has yet to set out her goals for defence policy in detail.

None the less, Clinton's record in the State Department and Senate is instructive. She has advocated the use of 'smart power', and argued that the United States' global leadership is an indispensable precondition for ensuring its security at home, a point she has underscored in her support for its role in organizations such as NATO.<sup>8</sup> While she has supported President Obama, at times she has championed positions that are more hawkish than his.<sup>9</sup> In 2003, for instance, Clinton voted in the Senate to authorize military action against Iraq, and six years later, as secretary of state, she supported the surge of US troops in Afghanistan. She also urged intervention in Libya against the regime of Muammar Gaddafi. After the Syrian civil war erupted in 2011, she argued for arming and training vetted opposition groups, and she continues to advocate a no-fly zone to protect civilians from the Assad regime and ISIS, urging the United States to 'intensify and broaden ... efforts to smash the would-be caliphate and deny ISIS control of territory in Iraq and Syria'.<sup>10</sup> Achieving this would require a larger coalition air campaign than the current one, and Clinton acknowledges that this policy would 'have to be combined with ground forces actually taking back more territory from ISIS'.<sup>11</sup> But she also stresses that her policy would merely be 'an intensification, an acceleration' of President Obama's one and not a re-enactment of the 2003 US occupation of Iraq, a policy she subsequently expressed regret for supporting.<sup>12</sup>

Despite her differences with President Obama on Syria, Clinton has championed other initiatives that interventionists strongly opposed. The most prominent example is the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran regarding its nuclear programme, the groundwork for which Clinton helped lay while leading the Department of State. She has since qualified her support for the JCPOA, however, by stressing that the United States must continue to counter aggressive Iranian behaviour in the region.<sup>13</sup>

In general, the United States' citizens and its allies can expect Clinton's defence policy to broadly resemble that of President Obama's. That said, if her past positions are any indication, a Clinton administration could adopt a more aggressive defence posture, and be more comfortable with the option of putting military action on the table. Clinton fully acknowledges the 'slippery slope' Obama has consistently sought to avoid in deploying hard power abroad. She also acknowledges that limited military engagement has the potential to drag the United States into prolonged conflict. But she does not shy away from the use of force and has a comfortable and long-standing relationship with the US military. However, she also understands that diplomacy, as a key building block of a smart-power approach, can at times be more effective than force.

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<sup>8</sup> Masters, J. (2016), 'Here's How Clinton and Trump Stack Up on National Security, Russia, ISIS and More', *Defense One*, 24 July 2016, [http://www.defenseone.com/politics/2016/07/heres-how-clinton-and-trump-stack-national-security-russia-isis-and-more/130166/?oref=defenseone\\_today\\_nl](http://www.defenseone.com/politics/2016/07/heres-how-clinton-and-trump-stack-national-security-russia-isis-and-more/130166/?oref=defenseone_today_nl) (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>9</sup> Traub, J. (2015), 'The Hillary Clinton Doctrine', *Foreign Policy*, 6 November 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/11/06/hillary-clinton-doctrine-obama-interventionist-tough-minded-president/> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Beckwith, R. T. (2015), 'Transcript: Read Hillary Clinton's Speech on Fighting ISIS', *Time*, 19 November 2015, <http://time.com/4120295/hillary-clinton-foreign-policy-isis/> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, (2015), 'Hillary Clinton on National Security and the Islamic State: A Conversation with Hillary Clinton', 19 November 2015, <http://www.cfr.org/radicalization-and-extremism/hillary-clinton-national-security-islamic-state/p37266> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Guardian* (2015), 'Hillary Clinton: Iran will never get a nuclear weapon on my watch', 15 July 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/15/hillary-clinton-iran-will-never-get-a-nuclear-weapon-on-my-watch> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

Clinton belongs to a generation of American policy-makers that places the transatlantic relationship at the heart of everything the United States does in the world. Her administration would likely seek to increase pressure on Russia for its belligerent actions in Eastern Europe. She has bluntly stated that she is ‘in the category of people who wanted us to do more in response to the annexation of Crimea and the continuing destabilization of Ukraine’.<sup>14</sup> As the architect of the first Obama administration’s attempted reset of relations with Russia, Clinton would react positively to cooperative signals from Russia and pursue constructive relations, but only if Russia chooses to modify its aggressive stance.<sup>15</sup> Until then, Clinton understands that Russia is attempting to re-establish a strong sphere of influence in the region and will support initiatives to reassure NATO members of the United States’ resolve to defend them under Article 5 if necessary.<sup>16</sup>

Clinton is a passionate supporter of increased US engagement in the Asia-Pacific and advocated for the Obama administration’s ‘rebalancing’ towards Asia.<sup>17</sup> However, Clinton has signalled that the United States should enhance its military engagement in the Asia-Pacific by guaranteeing that ‘the defence capabilities and communications infrastructure of [its] alliances are operationally capable of deterring provocation’.<sup>18</sup> As president, she would likely champion increased defence initiatives throughout the region, in addition to being more critical of Chinese encroachments on freedom of navigation. Clinton would also continue to push for a resolution to sovereignty disputes in the South China Sea on the basis of international law, a stance that has annoyed China, which interprets US commentary on its claim over the entire sea as meddling in its internal affairs.<sup>19</sup> More pressingly for defence policy, Clinton is keenly aware of the historic implications of China’s growing military and economic power for US interests and regional leadership. She has affirmed that the United States’ security commitments to Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and other allies are sacrosanct pillars of the Asia-Pacific’s stability, and she would be willing to use US military pressure if there was any indication that these allies were under threat. But she would also promote military-to-military dialogue with China to increase transparency and reduce the risk of accidents and miscommunication.<sup>20</sup>

Domestically, Clinton has avoided publicly supporting an increase in defence spending so far. She has called for a commission to examine the issue, saying: ‘I think we are overdue for a very thorough debate in our country about what we need, and how we are going to pay for it.’<sup>21</sup> She is likely to continue support for many of the defence programmes already in existence. Outside Congress, notable Republican foreign policy figures have endorsed Clinton in preference to their own party’s nominee. Given this, Clinton’s ability to mobilize a coalition in Congress in favour of her foreign policy priorities on matters such as Syria may not face insurmountable obstacles.

<sup>14</sup> Eckel, M. (2015), ‘Clinton Calls For Tougher Response To Russia On Ukraine, Syria’, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 9 September 2015, <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-us-clinton-calls-for-tougher-response-on-ukraine-syria/27235800.html> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>15</sup> *New York Times* (2016), ‘Transcript of the Democratic Presidential Debate’, 17 January 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/18/us/politics/transcript-of-the-democratic-presidential-debate.html> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>16</sup> CNN (2016), ‘Transcript of Hillary Clinton Speech on Counter-Terrorism’, 23 March 2016,

<http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1603/23/cnr.06.html> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Clinton, H. (2011), ‘America’s Pacific Century’, US Department of State, 10 November 2011,

<http://www.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2011/11/176999.htm> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Clinton, H. (2011), ‘America’s Pacific Century’, *Foreign Policy*, 11 October 2011, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>19</sup> Tiezzi, S. (2016), ‘Why China Dreads a Hillary Clinton Presidency’, *The Diplomat*, 10 February 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/02/why-china-dreads-a-hillary-clinton-presidency/> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Clinton (2011), ‘America’s Pacific Century’, *Foreign Policy*.

<sup>21</sup> Becker, A. (2015), ‘Clinton calls for commission to examine U.S. military spending’, Reuters, 17 September 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-clinton-defense-idUSKCN0RH37B20150917> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

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However, Republicans in Congress still hold the Department of State, and by extension, her, directly responsible for failing to stop the lethal attack on the US diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya, in 2012. Furthermore, the revelation that Clinton used a private email server, including for secret correspondence, during her time as secretary of state has been a constant thorn in her side during the presidential campaign. ‘Emailgate’ could continue to haunt her after election as some members of Congress have said that the FBI let her off the hook by not recommending criminal charges for mishandling classified information.<sup>22</sup> The congressional opposition stemming from these controversies may very well spill over into other areas during her presidency, potentially making it difficult for her to gain support for major defence initiatives.

### *Donald Trump*

The defence policy of a Donald Trump presidency would differ greatly not only from that of Hillary Clinton, but also from the thinking of the entire US foreign policy establishment.<sup>23</sup> Trump’s views on how the United States ought to position itself in world affairs and engage with allies and adversaries also differentiate him from virtually every major presidential candidate in recent history. His starting point is his core message of ‘America first’, which has resonated with at least some of the American people, and which he contrasts with a perceived weakness of President Obama’s foreign and defence policy. But Trump has also reversed his position on many issues during the campaign, which makes labelling his defence policy a difficult task since one can find elements of isolationism, realism and interventionism, sometimes even in the same statement.<sup>24</sup> Broadly, Trump appears to favour hard power for addressing global challenges such as ISIS, but he also promotes his ability to ‘cut deals’, a skill he has frequently invoked when asked how he would deal with world leaders like Russia’s President Vladimir Putin. Trump has touted a more forceful stance towards China, vowed to crush ISIS, promised to grow the military and pledged to stop allowing allies like Japan or NATO members to ‘free ride’ on the benefits of the US security blanket.

However, such statements give observers few clues about what Trump would do in practice. To the extent that he has put forward concrete policy proposals, they tend to lack details. On the Middle East, Trump advocates a more intensive campaign against ISIS, stating: ‘We have to knock out ISIS. We have to knock the hell out of them. We have to get rid of it.’<sup>25</sup> He wants the United States to ‘take the oil’ from ISIS and destroy oil fields in the broader Middle East, saying they are a primary source of income for terrorist organizations.<sup>26</sup> However, based on the political infeasibility of some of his suggestions, a Trump strategy against ISIS might not look all that different from that of the current administration, with the addition of more inflammatory rhetoric about Muslims. Predictions about Trump’s behaviour towards ISIS once in office are difficult to make because he has also criticized protracted American engagement in the Middle East as wasteful and ineffective. This suggests that

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<sup>22</sup> Collinson, S. (2016), ‘Republicans hit Comey over Clinton email probe, say issue isn’t over’, CNN, 8 July 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/07/07/politics/james-comey-hillary-clinton-email-hearing/> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>23</sup> War on the Rocks (2016), ‘Open Letter on Donald Trump from GOP National Security Leaders’, 2 March 2016, <http://warontherocks.com/2016/03/open-letter-on-donald-trump-from-gop-national-security-leaders/> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>24</sup> Kruse, M. and Weiland, N. (2016), ‘Donald Trump’s Great Self-Contradictions’, Politico, 5 May 2016, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/05/donald-trump-2016-contradictions-213869> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>25</sup> Garver, R. (2016), ‘Trump Does a U-Turn on How He’d Fight ISIS’, *Fiscal Times*, 22 March 2016, <http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/2016/03/22/Trump-Does-U-Turn-How-He-d-Fight-ISIS> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>26</sup> Atkinson, K. (2016), ‘Donald Trump Lays Out Foreign Policy Plan, Including How to Fight Terrorism’, NBC News, 26 March 2016, <http://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2016-election/donald-trump-lays-out-foreign-policy-plan-including-how-fight-n546056> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

he would recoil from making large commitments of troops to Syria, and instead continue existing initiatives such as air operations or training and supplying local forces.

Trump has repeatedly questioned the relevance of NATO and the benefits the United States receives for its de facto leadership of the alliance.<sup>27</sup> He has called NATO ‘obsolete’, promised that the United States would slash its financial contributions to the alliance, and indicated that he would pull all American troops out of Europe.<sup>28</sup> If elected president, Trump would likely seek to reverse the funding for the European Reassurance Initiative in order to get Europe to pay for its own security. The initiative was launched in 2014 to boost US military engagement in the region.<sup>29</sup> Trump does not appear to regard Russia’s behaviour in Ukraine as a threat to US interests, stating that he admires President Putin’s leadership and even going so far as to say that he would ‘take a look at’ accepting Russia’s annexation of Crimea.<sup>30</sup> However, once in office, Trump, who has promised that he would listen carefully to senior military leaders on national security matters, would quickly discover that the United States’ military leadership resoundingly supports membership of NATO, believing that it confers vast security advantages that justify the expense.<sup>31</sup> With no congressional or military support for ending the United States’ role in the alliance, Trump would face a tough backlash if he attempted to take steps to withdraw from it.

With regard to Asia, Trump focuses predominantly on the economic relationship with China. He has stated that the United States has ‘rebuilt China, and yet [China] will go in the South China Sea and build a military fortress the likes of which perhaps the world has not seen [because] they have no respect for our president and they have no respect for our country’.<sup>32</sup> Despite the hyperbolic nature of these comments, Trump largely views China through the lens of international trade and economic interests. It is unlikely he would either deepen military-to-military engagement with China or broaden security engagement with US partners in the Asia-Pacific, and it is also unlikely he would weigh in heavily on the disputes in the South China Sea. He would largely depend on regional stakeholders to handle the latter, promising instead to knock China by imposing punitive tariffs on its products.<sup>33</sup>

The US defence budget is one area in which Trump seems to differ from both President Obama and Clinton. Although he advocates a military that will ‘be much stronger than it is right now’, he also says: ‘We can do it for a lot less.’<sup>34</sup> He has also been highly critical of expensive weapons systems like the Littoral Combat Ship and the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. However, weapons procurement is

<sup>27</sup> Sanger, D. and Haberman, M. (2016), ‘Donald Trump Sets Conditions for Defending NATO Allies Against Attack’, *New York Times*, 20 July 2016, [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/21/us/politics/donald-trump-issues.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/21/us/politics/donald-trump-issues.html?_r=0) (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>28</sup> O’Toole, M. (2016), ‘Is NATO Still Relevant? Trump’s Not the Only One Asking’, *Foreign Policy*, 1 April 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/01/is-nato-still-relevant-trumps-not-the-only-one-asking/> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>29</sup> White House (2016), ‘FACT SHEET: The FY 2017 European Reassurance Initiative Budget Request’, 2 February 2016, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/02/02/fact-sheet-fy2017-european-reassurance-initiative-budget-request> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>30</sup> Diamond, J. (2015), ‘Donald Trump lavishes praise on ‘leader’ Putin’, CNN, 18 December 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/18/politics/donald-trump-praises-defends-vladimir-putin/> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>31</sup> Herb, J. and Wright, A. (2016), ‘Top U.S. Military leaders tout NATO’s relevance’, Politico, 30 March 2016, <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/03/nato-defense-carter-dunford-trump-221396> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>32</sup> *New York Times* (2016), ‘Transcript: Donald Trump Expounds on His Foreign Policy Views’, 26 March 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/27/us/politics/donald-trump-transcript.html> (accessed 8 Aug. 2016).

<sup>33</sup> Appelbaum, B. (2016), ‘Experts Warn of Backlash in Donald Trump’s China Trade Policies’, *New York Times*, 2 May 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/03/us/politics/donald-trump-trade-policy-china.html> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

<sup>34</sup> Gault, M. (2016), ‘Donald Trump is right about defense spending – and that should scare you’, Reuters, 2 March 2016, <http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2016/03/02/trump-is-right-about-defense-spending-and-that-should-scare-you/> (accessed 3 Aug. 2016).

the product of a web of political relationships between the Department of Defense, defence companies and Congress that presidents often have a hard time navigating effectively. Trump, who has no experience in defence budget planning or policy, would likely find himself facing tough resistance from the defence community if he blatantly contradicted its recommendations and pursued aggressive cuts to existing procurement projects. But therein lies the real rub: in Trump's view, the national security 'elites' are actually the ones to blame for many of the foreign policy failures over the past 15 years. It would therefore be unsurprising, and even expected, to see continuous friction between a Trump White House and other centres of decision-making, as well as the wider foreign policy community.

## International implications

The next president will need to respond to increasing scepticism among Americans about the value of engagement abroad, international institutions and alliances. Americans are wary of war and would likely disapprove of increased military engagement. Currently, 60 per cent of those aged 18–29 oppose sending ground troops to Iraq and Syria, and 47 per cent of the population say that relying too much on military force creates resentment towards the United States and more terrorism.<sup>35</sup> The United States' allies and partners should expect the next president to ask more of them in order to appease such concerns that it is doing too much in the world. This could include advocating increased contributions to international missions such as the counter-ISIS coalition, or pushing NATO members to further increase their defence budgets. For Europe in particular, the United States will be looking for its allies to contribute more militarily to shaping the future of the Middle East and possibly Asia as well.

The next eight years could look very different for the United States and its allies in terms of defence. A Clinton presidency could usher in a new era of deepening engagement and cooperation, especially military-to-military, with existing allies. Clinton has deep experience in diplomacy and military policy, and she knows how to lay out her case and advocate for her own positions at home and abroad. A Trump presidency could, on the other hand, pull the United States inward and lead to disengagement from world affairs. But because he has never before held elected office and predictions about his behaviour are difficult to make, it is possible that the pressure of unforeseen crises and the complexity of the international security landscape could unexpectedly lead to a more aggressive American policy in the Middle East or Asia.

Both approaches – enhanced global engagement or non-interventionism – have pros and cons. Focusing on the homeland gives the United States the opportunity to rebuild its economy and tackle domestic issues like immigration and healthcare. These are the issues that historically resonate with the public and determine a president's popularity at home. But this is only one piece of the puzzle. A United States that is disengaged from world affairs could be detrimental to the liberal world order, which could, in turn, have a knock-on effect on American strength through increased international instability and uncertainty. This does not mean that the United States should be the guarantor of security in all corners of the globe. But it does mean that it should use its position in the world to

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<sup>35</sup> Pew Research Center (2016), *Public Uncertain, Divided Over America's Place in the World*.

help strengthen the foundation upon which the liberal order is built. The difficulty will be for the next president to find a happy medium that addresses the concerns of both the US public and America's allies, which are often at odds. Friendly foreign powers will continue to seek greater US influence and reassurance. Foreign competitors may attempt to create instability and expose American vulnerabilities. Both will have a strong impact on the next president's defence policy.

## Conclusion

Although the rhetoric stemming from the Trump and Clinton campaigns are on opposite sides of the spectrum, there are a few things to keep in mind. One is that whoever is elected will still be confined by the political realities of the office. This is precisely why it is difficult for presidents to deliver on many of their campaign promises. Many actions, especially those that employ the US military, require congressional support, and absence of this support makes policies almost impossible to push through. Clinton could run into this problem if she wants to ramp up military engagement in Europe and the broader Middle East, while Trump could also run into this issue if he wants to cut the defence budget or aggressively tackle ISIS through an indiscriminate bombing campaign. Finally, a president's success largely hinges on popular support. Unpopular defence policies come under intense scrutiny, so any unconventional or extreme policies would likely (and quickly) be met with a backlash not only from public opinion, but also from the many experts writing about and analysing the administration and subsequently shaping public opinion. Whatever the outcome, it is abundantly clear that this is one of the most consequential presidential elections in US history, and it will shape the future of the United States' role in the world for years, even decades, to come.

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