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Research in Greater Depth: Foreign Policy

Instructions: Read the following news article excerpts and poll data and complete the “Source Analysis” handout.

Excerpts of News Articles

Source 1

Wall Street Journal: “Where Trump and Biden Stand on Foreign Policy” by Warren P. Strobel and Michael R. Gordon, September 19, 2020. <<https://www.wsj.com/articles/where-trump-and-biden-stand-on-foreign-policy-11600507801>>

President Trump and Democratic opponent Joe Biden have profound differences in key areas of U.S. foreign policy, but hold similar views about some major goals, including limiting troop deployments to the Middle East and Afghanistan.

Mr. Trump has aimed to highlight his foreign-policy credentials in the closing weeks of the 2020 campaign. In quick order, he has overseen peace agreements between Israel and two Gulf Arab states; helped launch Afghan peace talks; reduced troops in Iraq and Afghanistan; and pushed for a framework arms-control agreement with Russia.

Mr. Biden, with decades of international experience as a former senator and vice president, has criticized Mr. Trump for weakening U.S. alliances, strengthening ties to dictators and failing to curb Iran’s nuclear program after withdrawing from a 2015 accord negotiated when Mr. Biden was serving under President Obama....

U.S. Alliances

Mr. Biden wrote in the journal *Foreign Affairs* that Mr. Trump “has belittled, undermined, and in some cases abandoned U.S. allies and partners,” weakening America’s world standing....

Mr. Trump has been skeptical of Washington’s post-World War II alliances, seeing NATO members as economic competitors who should pay significantly more for their own defense. He has pressed Japan and South Korea to pay more to reimburse the U.S. for its troop deployments in those countries. He filed notice to quit the Paris agreement last year, saying it unfairly penalized American workers.

Iran and North Korea

Trump and Biden differ sharply on how to curtail Iran’s nuclear program. Mr. Biden favors returning to the 2015 Iran nuclear accord, on the condition that Tehran, too, abides by the agreement, whose uranium enrichment limits it breached after Mr. Trump’s decision to withdraw. Mr. Biden has said he would try to negotiate a tougher, follow-on accord but hasn’t spelled out details.

Mr. Trump would continue his campaign of maximum economic pressure. But his conditions for a new agreement—an end to all nuclear enrichment and an Iranian pullback in the region—have been rebuffed by Tehran.

North Korea has stopped meeting with U.S. negotiators, and neither candidate has publicly explained how they plan to induce Pyongyang to denuclearize. Mr. Biden has said he would coordinate with China and other nations to negotiate the elimination of North Korea nuclear weapons.

Mr. Trump held two summit meetings with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, but failed to persuade Pyongyang to give up its nuclear arsenal and long-range missiles....

Troop Deployments

Mr. Biden has said he would bring most U.S. troops home from Afghanistan and the Middle East, while focusing the mission on countering al Qaeda and Islamic State.

Mr. Trump has said he wants a complete withdrawal from Afghanistan. The number of troops,

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which totaled about 13,000 in February, is being cut to 4,300 by the fall.

Neither candidate has spelled out their longer-term plans for troops in Iraq and Syria.

Middle East

Relations with Saudi Arabia would be far cooler under a President Biden, if he adheres to his campaign rhetoric.

He has pledged to end U.S. arms sales to the kingdom and told the Council on Foreign Relations last year he would “order a reassessment of our relationship with Saudi Arabia,” citing its war in Yemen and the 2018 killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Source 2

Reuters: “The foreign policy issues that divide Trump and Biden” by Simon Lewis and Michael Martina, September 18, 2020 <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-foreign-policy-factbox/the-foreign-policy-issues-that-divide-trump-and-biden-idUSKBN2691OE>>

Republican President Donald Trump won election in 2016 promising to put “America First,” overturn what he said were unfair trade deals and force U.S. allies to pay more toward joint defense measures.

In the Nov. 3 election, he will face off against Democratic former Vice President Joe Biden, who pledges to restore U.S. global leadership and reverse many of Trump’s actions. Here’s a look at their foreign policy differences:

China

Under Trump, U.S.-China relations have slid to their lowest levels in recent history over a wide range of issues. Trump says he is the first president in decades to stand up to Beijing, and his campaign accuses Biden of appeasing China as U.S. manufacturing jobs declined.

Biden has countered that Trump’s handling of the coronavirus pandemic was a historic blunder, and that he disregarded U.S. intelligence community warnings over China downplaying its severity.

Trump began a trade war with China before reaching a partial Phase 1 trade deal in January. He has since shut the door on Phase 2 negotiations,

Mr. Trump strongly backs Saudi Arabia and its crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, as a strategic ally against Iran. He brushed aside an intelligence finding that Prince Mohammed likely ordered Mr. Khashoggi’s death and vetoed congressional attempts to curb weapon sales to Riyadh.

expressing unhappiness with Beijing’s handling of the pandemic.

Biden argues that China relishes a chaotic Trump administration, his alienation of American allies, and his abdication of U.S. leadership roles in global institutions.

Biden says he will correct this by bringing multilateral pressure to bear on China through renewed relations with U.S. allies.

Iran

Trump has questioned the benefits of U.S. military interventions in the Middle East, especially the 2003 Iraq invasion, and pulled out of a nuclear deal reached with Iran, European nations and Russia under President Barack Obama.

But Trump sent more troops to the region after the withdrawal increased tensions with Iran.

Biden has said he would deal with Iran through diplomacy and re-enter the agreement, but only if Iran first resumed complying with the deal’s restrictions on its nuclear program.

After Iranian proxies and U.S. forces clashed in Iraq, Trump ordered the January strike that killed

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powerful Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani.

Biden said the strike “put the United States and Iran on a collision course” and proposes a narrower focus for the U.S. military in the region on counter-terrorism and working with local allies....

North Korea

Trump met with North Korea’s supreme leader Kim Jong Un three times in 2018 and 2019, but efforts to get Kim to abandon the country’s nuclear weapons program have stalled.

Biden has accused Trump of giving away U.S. leverage over the North Korean regime for little in return and said he would not meet Kim without preconditions....

Israel

Like past presidents, Trump has pledged to secure peace between Israel and the Palestinians. But, as before, that goal has proven elusive.

The administration moved the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem in 2018, a show of support for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that angered the Palestinians and their supporters.

The following year, the administration formally recognized Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, which Israel captured from Syria in 1967, reversing a long-standing U.S. policy and irking other countries.

In August, in a rare victory for U.S. diplomacy in the region, Trump brokered a deal between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, which agreed to normalize diplomatic relations. Israel said it would suspend planned annexations of parts of the occupied West Bank.

Bahrain joined the UAE in September in agreeing to normalize relations.

Biden welcomed the agreements and said if elected he would “leverage these growing ties into progress toward a two-state solution” in the Middle East.

Alliances

Biden would rejoin the Paris climate agreement and strengthen alliances like NATO, moves he says would undo damage to American leadership and credibility inflicted by Trump.

The president has angered NATO members and other U.S. allies, while refusing to criticize Russian leader Vladimir Putin, even when U.S. intelligence officials concluded Russia’s military had interfered in the 2016 presidential election. Biden has warned that Russia, China and others who try to interfere in U.S. elections will face serious consequences if he is elected.

Trump announced in June that he would reduce the number of U.S. troops in Germany by about 9,500, prompting criticism from Democrats and fellow Republicans who argue the U.S.-German alliance helps counter Russia and China’s influence.

Biden campaign aides say they are troubled by the move, and that Biden would revisit the issue as president.

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Polling Data

Chicago Council on Global Affairs: “Divided We Stand: Democrats and Republicans Diverge on US Foreign Policy,” September 17, 2020. <<https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/publication/lcc/divided-we-stand>>

COVID-19 reached American shores at the start of 2020 and has inflicted untold damage on both lives and livelihoods....

Despite the pandemic, Americans continue to reject retreat from the world. Instead, Americans across party lines continue to endorse robust US involvement and leadership internationally. Nearly seven in 10 (68%) maintain that the United States should take an active part in world affairs, and 54 percent overall say that the United States should be more involved, not less, in addressing the world’s problems (Figure B).

Figure B: US Role in World Affairs

Do you think it will be best for the future of the country if we take an active part in world affairs or if we stay out of world affairs? (%)
 n = 2,111



Americans view alliances as a key part of that engagement. Solid majorities continue to say alliances in Europe (68%) and East Asia (59%) mostly benefit the United States as well as its allies. About three-quarters still support maintaining or increasing the US commitment to NATO (73%). Seven in ten Americans (71%) believe that the United States should consult with major allies before making foreign-policy decisions. On each of these questions, majorities of both Democrats and Republicans agree....

Democrats Favor an Internationalist Approach: Diplomacy and Cooperation

A vast majority of Democrats (80%) say the COVID-19 outbreak has increased the importance of the United States coordinating and collaborating with other countries to solve global issues. Democrats’ strong support for working through international organizations is likely rooted in the belief that the United States is no greater a country than others (64%)—a sentiment that has grown dramatically since 2017, when just 43 percent agreed (Figure E)....

Republicans Favor a Nationalist Approach: Self-Sufficiency and Independence

In contrast to the Democrats, a majority of Republicans (58%) believe the COVID-19 outbreak has made

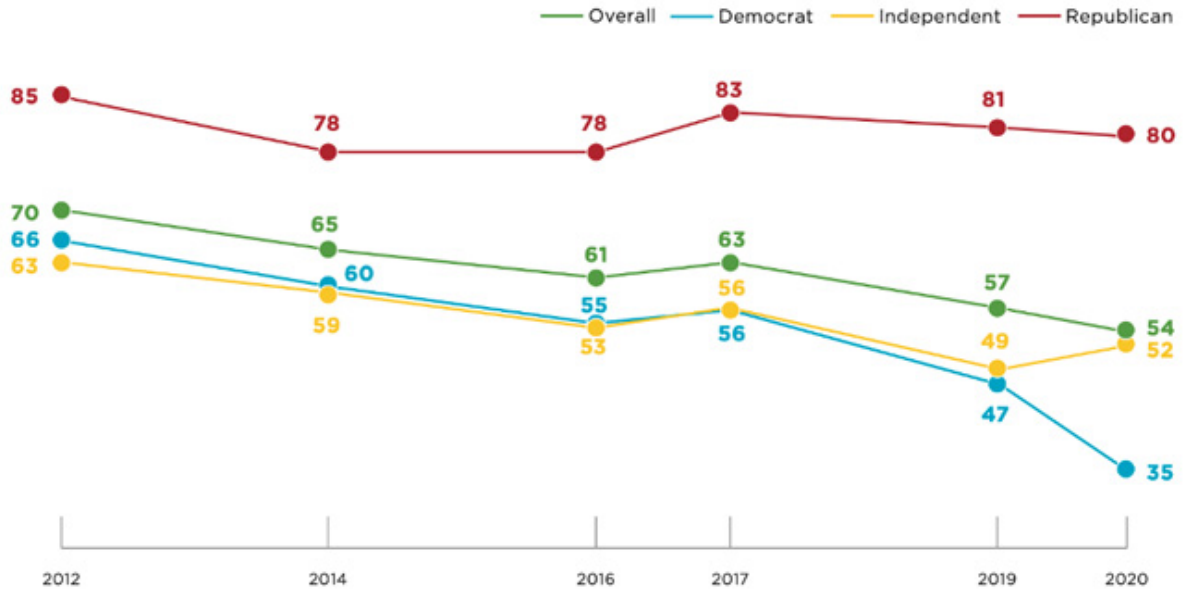
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it more important for the United States to be self-sufficient as a nation. This perspective likely rests upon the idea that the United States is exceptional (Figure E): 80 percent of Republicans say that the United States is the greatest country in the world, and close to half of Republicans (48%) agree that “the United States is rich and powerful enough to go it alone, without getting involved in the problems of the rest of the world.”

Figure E: American Exceptionalism

Some people say the United States has a unique character that makes it the greatest country in the world. Others say that every country is unique, and the United States is no greater than other nations. Which view is closer to your own? (% greatest country in the world)

n = 2,111



2020 Chicago Council Survey