

Republican Party Foreign Policy: 2016 and Beyond

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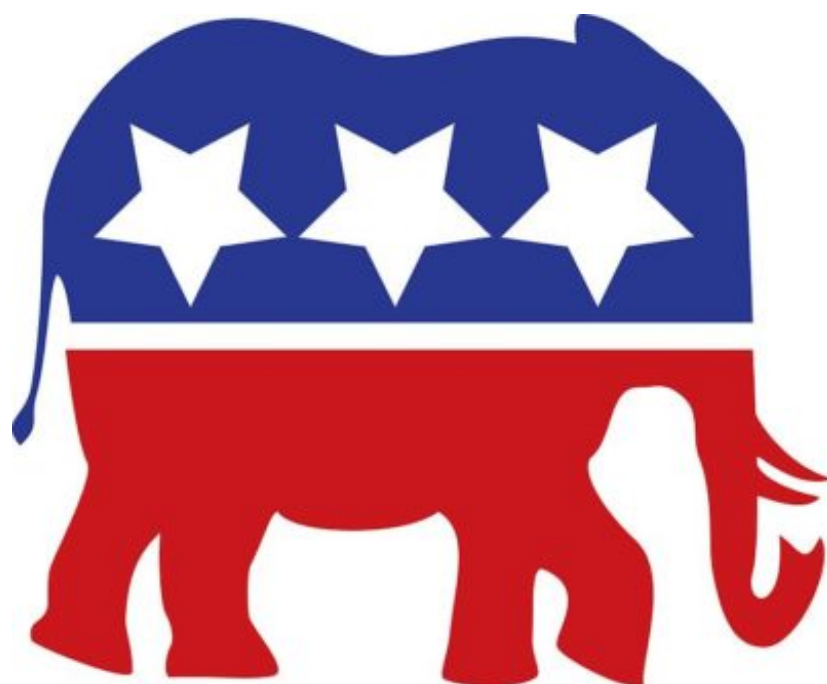
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E-Notes

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Republican voters today are divided between three broad tendencies: internationalist, nationalist, and non-interventionist. Donald Trump won the GOP presidential primaries this year partly by playing upon these divisions in an unconventional way. He assembled a new, ideologically cross-cutting insurgent coalition based upon strong support from non-college educated Republicans, directed against free trade, immigration, and policy elites from both parties. In effect, he pulled together nationalist and non-interventionist support against conservative internationalists, using his own polarizing personality as the focus. Since Trump is the GOP's nominee, these nationalist and non-interventionist tendencies now have greater sway within the party than at any moment since the 1930s. Yet in many ways, the foreign policy preferences of the average Republican voter are no different – and no more “isolationist” – than they were four or five years ago. This raises the interesting possibility that the long-term future of conservative internationalists may not be as dire as many seem to believe. But of course, if Trump becomes president, then his declared policy preferences and decision-making style will carry even more weight than they do today. Paradoxically, the future of a viable Republican foreign policy approach rests on Trump's defeat.

In this essay, I begin by outlining the differences between the GOP's main foreign policy tendencies, along with their historical relationship to one another. Then I describe how Trump defied historic norms to create a new coalition that won the nomination. Next, I sketch some possible futures for Republican foreign policy tendencies, depending upon the winner of this fall's presidential election. Foreign policy under a Trump administration is

likely to track the declared priorities and decision-making style of the president. If Hillary Clinton wins, however, then GOP foreign policy tendencies might go in one of several directions. I sketch these various directions, simplifying them into six distinct scenarios, and give reasons for their relative probability. Finally, I offer some normative implications for the November election.

Republican Party Foreign Policy Tendencies

The foreign policy tendencies of voters within the Republican Party can be placed into three broad categories: internationalist, nationalist, and non-interventionist.^[1] These tendencies are also represented within the full spectrum of GOP elected officials, opinion leaders, interest groups, media outlets, and foreign policy think-tanks.

Republican *internationalists* believe in an active US role overseas – economically, militarily, and diplomatically. They support existing US alliances and military commitments, along with free trade agreements, foreign aid programs, and relatively high levels of defense spending. At the elite level, this has been the dominant tendency within the Republican Party since World War Two. Every Republican president since Dwight Eisenhower has been an internationalist of one kind or another. There are of course significant differences between various types of GOP internationalists. Some, in the tradition of Richard Nixon, emphasize great power realpolitik. Others, like George W. Bush, emphasize democracy promotion and rogue state rollback. Yet both Nixon and Bush 43 were – like Eisenhower, Reagan, and Bush 41 – Republican internationalists who favored a forward American presence overseas. This basic commonality is worth keeping in mind, since not all Republicans share it.

The success of Donald Trump in the Republican primaries earlier this year encouraged the impression that broadly internationalist policies have no support whatsoever at the grassroots level within the GOP. This is a mistaken impression. In reality, even among those who voted for Trump in the primaries, select internationalist policies still carry considerable grassroots support. Just to take one example, Trump's own supporters are far more likely to look favorably upon NATO, than unfavorably.^[2] More will be said about this point later on. Yet Trump did campaign on a foreign policy platform dramatically different from any successful Republican candidate since the 1940s, and his nomination represented a severe defeat for GOP internationalists of all kinds.

Republican *non-interventionists* oppose US military commitments overseas. Many members of this school do support commercial opportunities and diplomatic engagement with other countries. But their defining feature is a deep resistance to US military intervention, bases, and alliances abroad. This was a dominant sentiment within the Republican Party during the 1920s and 1930s. In the US context, it often flows from a libertarian commitment to limited government at home – along with the conviction that said government tends to be undermined by international military entanglements. During the Cold War, this strain of thinking was marginalized among conservative Republicans, as anti-Communist policies won out. Non-interventionists were also temporarily subdued by the commonly recognized need to respond to the terror attacks of September 11, 2001. But frustrations in Iraq after 2003 gave anti-interventionist arguments a new lease on life, and indeed such arguments had been percolating on the edges of the GOP ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union, for example in the repeat presidential runs of former Nixon speechwriter Pat Buchanan.

Non-interventionists believe that America's war on terror has been overly militarized and a threat to civil liberties, under President Obama as well as George W. Bush. Some of the leading GOP non-interventionist candidates in recent years include former US Representative Ron Paul (R-TX) and his son, Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky. Both have run for president, and have a core following of libertarians, but both have been unable to expand their support beyond that limited core. One reason is that while libertarian non-interventionists represent a clear and principled point of view within the Republican Party, they are still very much a minority faction – including on foreign policy issues.^[3] The median Republican voter today is not so much non-interventionist, as nationalist.

Republican *nationalists* arguably make up a plurality of GOP voters at the grassroots level these days, but are badly underrepresented among foreign policy elites. This sometimes leaves such nationalists with few articulate proponents. Those few GOP foreign policy experts who are not internationalist, tend to be non-interventionist. In reality however, Republican nationalists are a recognizable third grouping, distinct from either of the other two. And during the Obama era, they rose to new prominence.

Conservative nationalists have no objection to either high levels of US defense spending, or to the most aggressive measures against terrorism. They are not remotely pacifist. At the same time, conservative nationalists disdain nation-building exercises, non-military foreign aid programs, humanitarian intervention, and international institutions designed to promote global governance. For nationalists, the maintenance of American sovereignty is paramount, and diplomatic engagements with known US adversaries are generally unwelcome. The basic conservative nationalist instinct is to maintain very strong defenses, punish severely any direct threats to US citizens, refuse international accommodations, and otherwise remain detached from multilateral commitments. This mentality is well captured by the words of the coiled snake on the yellow Gadsden flag, a favorite of Tea Party supporters: “Don’t tread on me.”

Historically, it is nationalists who have acted as the crucial pivot players within the GOP on foreign policy issues. When convinced of threats to the United States, they can be unyielding. During the Cold War for example, the GOP’s nationalists worked with its internationalists to press back against the Soviet Union and its allies overseas. Indeed a chief complaint of conservative nationalists for much of the Cold War was that the US was not doing enough to roll back Communism worldwide. After September 11, 2001, Republican nationalists again supported the most assertive measures taken by President George W. Bush in the “war on terror,” including the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Over the years however—and particularly since Barack Obama became president—many conservative nationalists have come to think twice about well-intentioned pro-democracy interventions in the Muslim world. This change of heart was significant in allowing for the rise of Donald Trump.

All told, Republican internationalists have dominated the party’s foreign policy ideas and practices since the presidency of Dwight Eisenhower, with conservative nationalists in a crucial but secondary supporting role. Non-interventionists have been marginalized. Put simply, what Trump did during the 2016 primaries was to unite the GOP’s nationalists with many of its non-interventionists in a full-blown and politically successful assault on the party’s dominant internationalist faction. The significance of this upset can hardly be overstated. There is really no precedent for it since World War Two.^[4]

How Trump Did It

A common pattern in GOP presidential primaries prior to 2016 was their eventual devolution into a contest between a mainstream, center-right, pragmatic internationalist with establishment support (e.g. Mitt Romney, John McCain), and an “insurgent” social conservative with close ties to evangelical Christians (Rick Santorum, Mike Huckabee). The evangelical favorite would do well in parts of the South and interior West, but ultimately lose to the more moderate candidate, for lack of organization or broad appeal.^[5] International issues were typically not a major source of disagreement between these candidates; both would be relatively hawkish, and neither would question the fundamentals of Republican national security policy. Those who did, like Ron Paul, lost badly.

Donald Trump rearranged and broke down this expected pattern by locating and emphasizing new sources of division within the Republican Party—including on foreign policy. He campaigned as neither a staunch evangelical conservative, nor an establishment-friendly pragmatist. Instead he ran as a furiously populist, anti-establishment nationalist. In doing so, Trump initially alienated college-educated Republicans, most conservative opinion leaders, and virtually the entire GOP establishment. Obviously, due to intense doubts surrounding Trump’s character and unorthodox policy stands, his campaign was highly controversial and polarizing inside the Republican Party. The extraordinary nature of his candidacy drove up voter turnout in the Republican primaries, both for and against him. Over 17 million people cast their votes for candidates other than the eventual nominee—an unprecedented number in a GOP primary. But Trump’s platform and candidacy turned out to have surprising reach toward a range of Republican primary voters across the usual ideological and regional intraparty divisions, and of course his opponents were divided. Exit polls from multiple primaries revealed that Trump’s supporters saw him as a strong, independent-minded leader, capable of bringing needed change to Washington. For these particular voters, Trump’s brash, combative style, his war on “political correctness,” his outsider status, and his scathing attacks on the elites of both parties were all assets, not liabilities.

Trump did equally well in the Northeast and the Deep South, with GOP moderates as well as conservatives. Indeed on multiple domestic policy issues, such as entitlement reform, the minimum wage, and Planned Parenthood, he took positions that were moderate to liberal. This was precisely why many staunch Republicans fought Trump so bitterly in the primaries: he really had no prior connection to the American conservative movement, nor to its preferred policy positions on numerous issues. Yet Trump's persona and issue positioning turned out to be appealing to one major, numerous constituency: working-class Republicans, and those without a college education. Among this core constituency, Trump did very well throughout the Republican primary season, across regional and ideological lines. He also polled particularly well with older white men. In the end, Trump won on average about 40% of the popular vote until his last opponent dropped out. This was enough for him to win most of the contested party primaries and caucuses outside of the Great Plains, the one region where his bombastic personality seemed to carry less appeal.

The New York businessman's unusual stance on numerous international and transnational issues was extremely divisive, even inside the GOP, but at the same time important to his nomination. Several of his most attention-getting proposals, considered unworkable and outlandish by policy experts from both major parties, were in fact overwhelmingly popular with Republican primary voters. These included, for example, his notion of a temporary ban on all Muslim immigrants into the United States, as well as a full-blown security wall on America's southern border, paid for by Mexico.^[6] While establishment internationalists tended to favor immigration reform, by 2015-16 over 60% of Republican voters had come to view mass immigration into the US as a "critical threat."^[7] Trump tapped into this sentiment and encouraged it by proposing to identify and deport some eleven million illegal immigrants living in the United States. Trump's protectionist stance on numerous international trade agreements, past and present, was also highly unusual for a winning GOP candidate. But since roughly half of Republican voters shared vaguely protectionist views on international trade, as of 2015, Trump's position held considerable populist appeal.^[8]

Trump won over many of the GOP's non-interventionist voters with full-throated critiques of the 2003 Iraq invasion, denunciations of "nation-building," and repeated declarations that multiple US interventions within the Muslim world had produced nothing of benefit to the United States.^[9] Yet he did not really run as any sort of foreign policy dove. On the contrary, he called for the most brutal measures against jihadist terrorists—up to and including torture—and a more aggressive campaign against ISIS along with increases in US defense spending. Trump's hawkish language against jihadist terrorism was crucial to his nomination. He won precisely by *not* being a thoroughgoing anti-interventionist on national security issues. The majority of Republican voters, including conservative nationalists, do not hold non-interventionist views with regard to ISIS and Al Qaeda. The more consistently dovish views of a Ron Paul, for example, remain a losing position politically inside a Republican primary. Principled libertarians understand that Trump is not one of them, and are more likely to support Gary Johnson, the Libertarian Party's candidate for president, in November. For a third-party candidate, Johnson is polling unusually well this year, at between 5 and 10% of all voters nationwide.

Altogether, the image offered by Trump was of a sort of Fortress America, or perhaps a gigantic gated community, separated from transnational dangers of all kinds by a series of walls—tariff walls against foreign exports, security walls against Muslim terrorists, literal walls against Hispanic immigrants, and with the sense that somehow all these dangers might be inter-related under the rubric of the "the false song of globalism."^[10] For longstanding and diehard nationalists like Pat Buchanan, this was music to their ears—vindication, after decades in the wilderness.^[11] And even for many GOP voters less dogmatic than Buchanan, yet feeling displaced by long-term trends toward cultural and economic globalization, the promise of the country's security, separation, and reassertion of control sounded both plausible and compelling. In the end, Trump carved out unique niche appeal in the 2016 Republican primaries by combining a colorful celebrity personality with working-class appeal, a fiercely anti-establishment persona, unapologetic American nationalism, hardline stands against both terrorism and illegal immigration, protectionism on trade, media manipulation, and a withering critique of past military interventions by presidents from both parties. The combination was highly unorthodox, controversial, and divisive, but it was enough to win the nomination.

The Death of Conservative Internationalism?

The interesting thing about public opinion and international policy issues in 2015-16 however, despite Trump's rise, is that current Republican sentiment on these issues is broadly similar to Republican opinion in 2011-12. Public opinion polls taken over the years by organizations including Gallup, the Pew Research Center, and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs confirm this rather surprising finding. In 2015-16, a clear majority of Republicans supported increased defense spending, energetic counter-terror measures, US alliances, NATO, Israel, and a leading role for the United States internationally. The most common Republican concern was hardly that President Obama had overreached in fighting ISIS and Al Qaeda, but that he had not gone far enough.[12] GOP opinion was more divided on issues of trade, foreign aid, and immigration, but even here, many Republicans – sometimes a majority – supported internationalist positions in 2015-16. For example:

- A poll released by the Chicago Council in September 2015 – a month during which Trump was already at the top of GOP primary polls—found that 69% of Republicans favored “taking an active part in world affairs,” as opposed to “staying out.” This was higher than the number of Democrats or independents who agreed with “taking an active part.”[13]
- In that same poll, 57% of Republicans agreed that “signing free trade agreements with other countries” is effective in “achieving the foreign policy goals of the United States.”[14]
- 83% of Republicans agreed that “maintaining existing alliances” overseas is similarly effective.[15]
- 65% of Republicans supported increased “economic and diplomatic sanctions on Russia,” in response to Putin’s ongoing aggression in Ukraine.[16]
- A Gallup poll released in February 2016 found that 50% of Republicans viewed foreign trade as an “opportunity” rather than a “threat.”[17]
- A Gallup poll released in July 2016 found that while 50% of Republicans favor deporting all immigrants who are living in the US illegally, 48% of Republicans oppose such measures.[18]

Public opinion polls taken in 2011-12 paint a rather similar picture to 2015-16. [19] Like most Americans, Republicans had mixed feelings about numerous US international engagements four or five years ago. They continue to have mixed feelings today. And yet Republicans nominated Mitt Romney in 2012, as opposed to Donald Trump in 2016. This would seem to suggest that the nomination of a straightforward internationalist in the earlier case, and something quite different recently, has much to do with the contingencies of the presidential primary process, as opposed to any truly radical shift in overall Republican voter foreign policy opinion.

Common assessments of public opinion also frequently suffer from the assumption that most voters must have strong, fixed views on a wide range of complicated and sometimes obscure international issues. But while voter opinion on foreign policy is not irrational per se, it is often characterized by considerable uncertainty and fluidity, along with a certain selective deference to party leadership. Foreign policy issue stands are furthermore bundled into broad platforms held by those same party leaders at any given time, especially in the case of a presidential election. Many partisans are willing to overlook a specific change in issue position, particularly when that issue is of low salience to them, in order to maintain support for their party overall. The most common Republican response to Trump’s nomination—namely, to support him—is an excellent example of this. Or to put it another way: some of Trump’s supporters did not know they opposed free trade, until he told them so. Changing poll results reflected that shift, in a protectionist direction.[20] This suggests the need for a model of foreign policy opinion that allows for the possibility of leadership and persuasion, as well as partisan deference and agenda-setting, rather than simply assuming public opinion is unalterably fixed. In the past, each Republican president has played an absolutely crucial role in redefining the foreign policy of his own party—and fellow Republicans have tended to rally behind him.[21] Of course this also has major implications for the future, in that GOP foreign policy under a President Trump will in all probability be what he says it is.

During the presidential primaries, Trump did what successful political entrepreneurs often do: he identified new axes of debate, persuaded the uncertain, and changed the conversation.[22] He built a new type of insurgent coalition inside the GOP, focused on his own personality, and appealing to a plurality of the party’s most disaffected, anti-establishment, nationalist, protectionist, and non-interventionist members. Obviously the result was a disaster for conservative internationalists. Yet the very contingency of this outcome should suggest more hopeful possibilities in future primaries. Assuming Republican foreign policy opinion is broadly similar to what it

has been over the past five years – and so long as Trump is not the incumbent president – there is nothing to suggest that a measured internationalist stance is necessarily doomed in future GOP primaries. But this stance will have to be tied into winning positions on domestic issues, and to a personality appealing to Republican voters, while recognizing those legitimate concerns that do exist on the part of conservative nationalists.

Republican Foreign Policy if Trump Wins

Some prominent Republicans have suggested that if Trump is elected president, he will be pulled in a much more responsible, well-considered, internationalist direction on major foreign policy and national security decisions—including by the Republican establishment. I believe this is unlikely.

First, the US foreign policy system is ultimately president-centered. One need not view the White House as all-powerful to understand that for better or worse the beliefs, personality, and decision-making style of each individual president really do make a tremendous difference. Our last two US presidents are excellent examples of this. Congress, of course, has a very important role to play, as do leading cabinet officials, interest groups, bureaucratic actors, a free press, and the general public as a whole. The combined pressures on any chief executive can certainly be intense. In the end however, it is the president who decides exactly how to weigh up all of these pressures, and who literally makes the most important foreign policy decisions. Trump has made it abundantly clear that he will be the final arbiter of his own foreign policy advisory process. In this, he will be no different from previous presidents. So it would be worth taking seriously his declared policy preferences and decision-making style.

In terms of central foreign policy preferences, Trump's day-to-day flexibility on countless matters leaves many observers wondering if he really has any basic agenda beyond his own election. But on a number of very significant international and transnational issues, Trump has laid out a striking change in direction, however wrong-headed or lacking in specificity.^[23] On immigration, he has proposed the most draconian measures of any candidate in living memory, including the mass deportation of eleven million people, along with the exclusion or "extreme vetting" of adherents of an entire religion from entry into the United States. On free trade, he has repeatedly declared adamant opposition to agreements such as NAFTA and TPP in their current form, and has threatened increased tariffs against Chinese and Mexican exports. He appears to have no objection to Putin's creation of an expanded Russian sphere of influence in parts of Europe.^[24] With regard to US alliances, Trump has declared that "NATO is obsolete," and that Japan and South Korea should consider acquiring nuclear weapons. When speaking extemporaneously, he rarely distinguishes between America's allies and its adversaries, but instead seems to think of foreigners above all as costing the US jobs. On a few select issues, Trump's declared position does align with Republican internationalist preferences. For example, he favors increased defense spending. For the most part, however, the Republican nominee has made it clear that he looks to take US foreign policy in a very different direction not only from the past fifteen years, but from a broad range of US international economic and strategic commitments dating back to the 1940s. Nor is Trump's overall protectionist-nationalist stance a recent invention. Despite his many confusing contradictions when it comes to the details of foreign policy, he has in fact been saying for decades that he views a wide range of US trade agreements, alliance commitments, and military deployments abroad as an overly costly burden upon the United States.^[25] As president, he will have an empowered ability to press forward his declared agenda. Rather than dismissing Trump's policy pronouncements as utterly meaningless, observers should apply the same prudent standard as to any other candidate: assume that he may actually try to do what he proposes, and then judge him accordingly.

Apart from the broad direction, Trump's decision-making style is of equal significance, and equal concern. From the point of view of his supporters—and even a number of his critics—Trump can be bold, spontaneous, and sometimes downright funny. These qualities helped make him a stronger GOP primary candidate than most experts predicted. But as we have seen over the years, the qualities that make for a charismatic candidate are not exactly the qualities required for the solid conception and implementation of life-and-death foreign policy decisions.

Trump's claim is essentially that he can apply the same skills that have multiplied his fortune over the years, to

the negotiation of difficult agreements with allies and adversaries alike. But these skills are not necessarily transferable. His past experience may be that a combination of extreme unpredictability and outrageous theatrics—combined with threats of lawsuit and bankruptcy—have helped more than hurt his career, both in real estate and celebrity entertainment. But at the international political level, hardened autocrats in Moscow, Beijing, Tehran or Pyongyang are less likely to be impressed by scabrous tweets. And with regard to US allies overseas, Trump's characteristic negotiating tactics will of course undermine America's alliances, rather than bolstering them. His billions will not help him then.

Successful presidential foreign policy leadership requires among other things close attention to detail, honest policy assessment, personal steadiness, and emotional self-control. Whatever other winning qualities Trump may have on the campaign trail, he has not demonstrated these. On the contrary, he displays a stunning lack of interest in the realities of governance. It is no coincidence that Trump's openly declared foreign policy team is weaker than any in living memory. For as he says himself, he disdains the notion of policy expertise altogether.^[26] Trump declares quite clearly, and seems to believe, that his superior natural abilities leave him able to handle any situation. Yet over a period of several decades, he has shown little care in actually learning or truthfully representing many of the most basic facts surrounding major policy questions.^[27] There are few indications that he understands either the constitutional limits or grave responsibilities of the presidency. While bidding to become the most powerful man in the world, he has already shown on a weekly basis extreme personal pique, disorganized bellicosity, an addiction to false conspiracy theories, and a profound lack of impulse control. Nor are the personality traits of a seventy-year old man likely to change or be disempowered once in high office. This is not simply a moral problem, but a pragmatic one. Any mixture of narcissism, willful ignorance, and day-to-day volatility—when combined in the person of the president—has never produced practical US foreign policy success in the past. It is unlikely to do so in the future.^[28]

In sum, Trump proposes to scale back on numerous longstanding US commitments overseas, pursue protectionist trading policies, and crack down hard on immigration. The overall direction would be bad enough in itself. He then manages to combine it with a visibly dysfunctional temperament and decision-making style. Not without reason, the Economist Intelligence Unit has ranked his possible election as one of the top ten global economic risks this year.^[29] In all probability, a Trump foreign policy would be a disaster for the United States, for American allies overseas, and for the GOP by association. This is the likely future of Republican foreign policy under a potential President Trump.

Republican Foreign Policy if Clinton Wins

If Hillary Clinton is elected president this November, Republicans will continue to develop their own arguments on foreign policy issues—in response to international events, presidential initiatives, and public opinion—from political bases in Congress, think-tanks, interest groups, and the media. At the risk of oversimplification, looking ahead over the next five years (2016-2021), there are a number of possible scenarios:

1. Noninterventionists predominate.
2. Internationalists predominate.
3. Nationalists predominate.
4. Nationalist-noninterventionist alliance.
5. Nationalist-internationalist alliance.
6. Continued factionalism.

The most likely scenario under a first-term Clinton administration will be scenario 6—continued factionalism among Republicans over foreign policy issues. This is true for several reasons. First, the American political system, unlike a parliamentary model, does not provide for any “leader of the opposition.” GOP leaders in Congress will play a vital role, but as we have seen in recent years, there will also be influential and often unruly media voices, interest groups, conservative opinion leaders, and congressional members with their own individual constituents and opinions. Second, GOP voters are in fact divided amongst themselves over

numerous international and transnational matters, between the three major foreign policy tendencies listed above, and those divisions are unlikely to disappear—especially with Republicans in opposition. GOP internationalists in particular may agree with and support certain aspects of a Clinton foreign policy from time to time, depending upon the issue. But keep in mind that Republican internationalist convictions differ from liberal Democratic ones, and so a principled stance will sometimes require opposition rather than support. Moreover there will be powerful internal party pressures for leading GOP figures to oppose an overall Clinton agenda, and given the deep ideological differences between America's two major parties, many Republicans will in all sincerity find little to approve.

If Clinton wins, different Republican foreign policy factions will frequently work together in order to check or oppose elements of her international approach (scenarios 4 or 5), and GOP leaders in Congress will play a central part. But there will be no real GOP unity on foreign policy issues in the absence of a Republican president. It is the president who provides a focal point for party unity—and who rallies friendly supporters behind an overall policy agenda. Party supporters are often willing to defer to presidential preferences on specific international issues, when they feel they have a president sympathetic to their overall concerns and deserving of their loyalty. The same is true for Democrats. If the past is any indication, a future Republican president will be able to rally considerable GOP support for his or her specific international initiatives, simply by virtue of being a Republican. Until that time comes, no one foreign policy faction is likely to predominate consistently within the GOP—not only because sentiments are mixed, but because there is no executive mechanism to provide such unity.

Scenario 1, whereby noninterventionists come to dominate Republican foreign policy thinking, is probably the least likely of the six scenarios. To be sure, there will continue to be specific cases, such as Libya and Syria, where a great many Republicans oppose American intervention. On a wide variety of foreign policy issues, however—including the maintenance of US alliances overseas, increased defense spending, and aggressive counter-terrorism—most Republicans do not share a noninterventionist philosophy. With regard to ISIS for example, the clear opinion of most Republican voters is that President Obama has done too little militarily, not too much. Over the long-term, the best chance for noninterventionists will be to nominate a candidate of their own in 2020. But such a candidate will likely face the same obstacles that both Ron and Rand Paul faced in recent primary cycles, namely, that most GOP voters simply do not hold dovish foreign policy views.

Since conservative nationalists are positioned as pivot players between the Republican Party's internationalists and its anti-interventionists, in practical terms, nationalist influence (scenario 3) tends to collapse into scenario 4 or 5—a working arrangement with another conservative foreign policy faction. This is certainly true historically. Every Republican president from Dwight Eisenhower through George W. Bush operated and managed intraparty differences through a powerful alliance of Republican nationalists and Republican internationalists (scenario 5). And when internationalists lead such an alliance, then it tends to look something like scenario 2: internationalist predominance. This is exactly the pattern that frustrates GOP non-interventionists. Republican presidents during the 1920s on the other hand, from Harding to Hoover, operated through an intraparty alliance of nationalists and noninterventionists: scenario 4. This is precisely what made Trump's 2016 primary success so astonishing—in many ways, it harkened back to the GOP foreign policy coalitions of the 1920s. Trump showed it was once again possible to win on such a platform within a Republican primary. He has not yet shown that it is a winning coalition at the level of a general election—much less that it is a viable stance over the long-term.^[30]

If conservative nationalists can pivot in a non-interventionist direction, they can also pivot toward a more active foreign policy under a Republican president—and historically they often have. But for this to happen again in the future, winning GOP candidates will have to demonstrate a better feeling for their own party's base. Past Republican presidents have succeeded not by attacking or misunderstanding conservative nationalists in total, but by incorporating legitimate concerns into an overall platform—while rejecting that which is unacceptable. One can imagine a future conservative internationalist platform that accommodates reasonable concerns on the part of Trump's working-class supporters, without falling into Trump-like extremes. On immigration, for example, such a platform could emphasize border security, without calling for mass deportations likely to throw the country into recession. On trade, it could admit the pressures felt by many American workers as a result of globalization, and support reform-conservative proposals on health care, jobs, and education, without embracing self-defeating protectionism.^[31] On foreign policy, it could admit the hard limits of democracy promotion within the Arab world,

without disengaging from longstanding US alliance commitments. Above all, it could embrace a conservative leadership model informed by steady, serious policy analysis, rather than discombobulated rage. Obviously GOP primary voters were in no mood for a steady nominee this year. Until that changes, it seems unlikely that Republicans will take back the White House.

Conclusion

The final question is how conservative Republican internationalists will approach the November election. Many will of course vote for Trump, out of party loyalty, as out of a genuine distaste for both the leadership record and likely agenda of a President Clinton—including on domestic issues. At the same time, Trump's evident failings, combined with his unusual foreign policy pronouncements, have already led some noted conservative internationalists to openly endorse Hillary Clinton. To a degree that is currently underreported, there will furthermore be a significant minority of otherwise rock-ribbed conservatives who either stay home, vote for Libertarian candidate Gary Johnson, or cast their ballots for Republicans at the congressional, state, and local level—while refusing to vote in favor of either Clinton or Trump. Indeed in a close presidential election such otherwise stalwart Republicans may help decide the outcome, by refusing to support their party's nominee. This would be a perfectly reasonable decision. Conservative internationalists are, after all, conservative, and cannot be expected to welcome or endorse another four years of liberal legislation under a Democratic president. Still, Trump is not a normal presidential candidate. On the contrary, he represents a stunning collapse of internal standards within the GOP, and beyond that, in minimal expectations for the honest, literate, and qualified leadership of the world's most powerful democracy. If Republicans with profound doubts about Trump do not believe that Clinton meets these minimal expectations either, then they can abstain from voting for either major party candidate—because whatever the outcome, no principled conservative will be elected president on November 8th. A Clinton win, if it occurs, will at least offer Republicans a chance to recover from the Trump fiasco on more solid ground. A Trump win, on the other hand, will leave the Republican Party bound hand and foot to this individual, to an even greater extent than it is today. Many conservative internationalists will not want to vote for Clinton, and the reason for this is understandable. But for the long-term health of the GOP as a conservative party with some integrity, not to mention America's role in the world, they should welcome Trump's defeat.

Notes:

[1] These categories are developed at greater length in my book, *The Obama Doctrine: American Grand Strategy Today* (Oxford University Press, 2015), chapter 4.

[2] Among supporters of Trump in the GOP primaries, 64% said that “being a member of NATO is good for the US,” while 30% disagreed. Support for NATO was even higher among other Republicans. Pew Research Center, “Public Uncertain, Divided over America's Place in the World,” (April 2016), 47-48.

[3] The Brookings Institution, “2013 American Values Survey: In Search of Libertarians in America,” (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2013).

[4] For a history of Republican foreign policy tendencies since 1940, see Colin Dueck, *Hard Line: The Republican Party and US Foreign Policy since World War II* (Princeton University Press, 2010).

[5] Henry Olsen, “A GOP Dark Horse?” *National Affairs* 8 (Summer 2011), 106-120.

[6] Gregory Holyk, “Foreign Policy in the 2016 Presidential Primaries Based on the Exit Polls,” Chicago Council on Global Affairs, April 7, 2016.

[7] Chicago Council on Global Affairs, “America Divided: Political Partisanship and US Foreign Policy,” (September 15, 2015), 31-32.

- [8] By 2015, Republicans were less supportive of foreign trade than the average voter. Justin McCarthy, "Majority in US Still See Opportunity in Foreign Trade," *Gallup*, March 9, 2015.
- [9] Contrary to Trump's own claims, there is no evidence that he opposed the invasion of Iraq before it began. In fact his only recorded statement on the subject prior to March 2003 was in favor of the invasion. He later turned against the war over the course of 2003-04. For Trump's recorded statements at the time, see Christopher Massie, Megan Apper, and Andrew Kaczynski, "A Guide to Donald Trump's Shifting Position on the Iraq War," *Buzzfeed*, February 20, 2016.
- [10] Donald Trump, "Trump on Foreign Policy," *The National Interest*, April 27, 2016.
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- [12] Pew Research Center, "Public Uncertain," 1-2, 7-8, 16-17, 28-48.
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- [24] Jeffrey Gedmin, "How the GOP Abandons Ukraine," The Atlantic Council, July 20, 2016.
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- [27] For a fair-minded biography of Trump supporting this conclusion, see Michael D'Antonio, *Never Enough: Donald Trump and the Pursuit of Success* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2015).
- [28] Emotional intelligence and stability is a surprisingly strong predictor of presidential success. See Fred Greenstein, *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from FDR to Barack Obama* (Princeton University Press, 2009 edition).
- [29] Anthony Zurcher, "Trump presidency rated among top 10 global risks: EIU," BBC News, March 17, 2016.
- [30] Public opinion polls have shown Clinton with a double-digit advantage over Trump on foreign policy issues throughout 2016. For a good summary analysis, see Nate Silver, "If Americans Perceive a World in Chaos, Will They Turn to Trump?" *FiveThirtyEight*, July 19, 2016.

[31] Yuval Levin, *The Fractured Republic: Renewing America's Social Contract in the Age of Individualism* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).