

H.R. McMASTER

21ST CENTURY GEOPOLITICS AND U.S. SECURITY

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States remained the world's sole superpower, taking on a new role of unrivaled geopolitical hegemon. Political scientist Francis Fukuyama (1992) predicted this would mark "the end of history" as capitalism and the Western way of life would now spread across the globe bringing about an era of democratization and prosperity. Nineteen years later, those voices have disappeared because serious **challenges to U.S. geopolitical dominance** have emerged: China is moving at rapid speed toward superpower status (perhaps it has even already reached that level), Russia is once again flexing its muscles in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Meanwhile, divisions have surfaced within the U.S. sphere of influence, with doubts about the future of NATO and the unsuccessful attempt to initiate multilateral relations with East Asia (through the Obama-era Trans-Pacific Partnership). It seems safe to conclude that we have by no means reached the end of history and geopolitics remains a competitive arena for the time being.

There is disagreement about the reasons for the relative decline in U.S. influence, but it is clear that the U.S. needs a strategy to deal with an emerging China and a potentially revivalist Russia in addition to "rogue states" such as North Korea and Iran. The Trump administration, with its unilateralist, "America First" foreign policy, has made marks on the geopolitical landscape by starting a trade war with China, negotiating with the North Korean regime, abandoning the Iran Nuclear Agreement, and abruptly pulling U.S. troops out of northern Syria (ceding influence there to Russia and Turkey). Furthermore, there are concerns about compromised internal U.S. security, especially in the cybersphere, with Russian interference casting doubts on the integrity of the 2016 General Election and China rapidly advancing its fifth generation cellular network technology (5G).



McMaster advocates for strong U.S. military engagement

Photo Credit: Mike Morones/Military Times

Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster has worked on geopolitical issues for decades, most notably as President Trump's National Security Advisor between February 2017 and March 2018. Prior to that, he served on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan and held various top posts in U.S. Central Command. Since the somewhat controversial end of his tenure as National Security Advisor, McMaster has been working for the think tank Foundation for the Defense of Democracy in addition to teaching International Studies, Public Policy, and Management at Stanford University. He has since voiced criticism of the Trump administration's advances toward North Korea and the decision to retreat from northern Syria. McMaster's memoir *Battlegrounds* will be published this year, detailing his 34-year-long military career as well as his time in the Trump administration.

"We are only as strong as our faith in
our values, our pride in our heritage,
and our resolve to do our part for
peace"

H.R. McMaster, at the 2017 Munich Security Conference

GEOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE



United States



China



European Union*



Russia

Population	3rd (329 million)	1st (1.4 bil.)	513 mil.	9th (145 mil.)
Economic Strength (GDP)	1st (\$21.41 trillion)	2nd (\$15.54 tr.)	\$18.71 tr.	11th (\$1.6 tr.)
Military Spending	1st (\$649 billion)	2nd (\$250 bil.)	\$199 bil. (in 2016)	6th (\$61 bil.)
Human Development Index	13th (very high)	86th (high)	4th to 32nd (very high)	49th (very high)

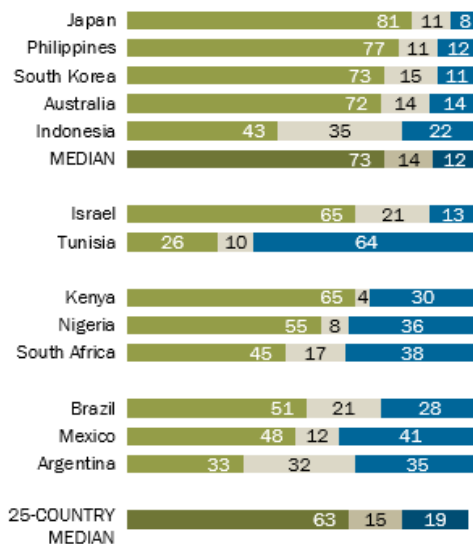
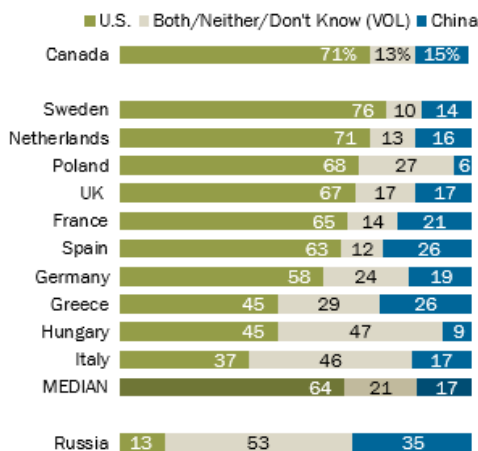
Sources: World Population Review (2019), UN Development Index (2018)

*statistics combine all 28 member states

Many still look to the U.S. for Leadership

In many countries, large majorities prefer U.S. leadership

It would be better for the world to have ___ as the leading power



Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey, Q33.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

According to this [Pew Research](#) survey, American global leadership remains popular in most countries, at least in comparison to Chinese leadership. In the 25 countries surveyed, 63 percent of respondents said it would be better for the world to have the U.S. as the leading power than China. Only 19 percent preferred Chinese leadership. A [Eurasia Group](#) survey indicates, however, that the U.S. population is reluctant to support strong American engagement in the world (see bottom left).

U.S. support for global engagement is low

Peace is best achieved and sustained by the U.S. by ...

... keeping a focus on domestic needs and the health of American democracy, while avoiding unnecessary intervention beyond the borders of the U.S.



... establishing, encouraging, and reinforcing global economic integration, as well as the growth of free trade.



... maintaining overwhelming strength and deploying it only when America is attacked or our vital interests are compromised by another power.



... promoting and defending democracy around the world.



Source: EGF

McMaster's View

H.R. McMaster says the public is fed a 'war-weariness' narrative that hurts US strategy

According to the Military Times, McMaster explained Americans' reluctance for military engagement on the world stage with an inaccurate "defeatist narrative" that has been subjected to the public. While speaking at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, he argued that the cost of war has dropped considerably and that the mission in Afghanistan should not be abandoned, considering U.S. troops there are protecting "a fundamentally transformed society" and keeping the Taliban in check.

Military Times

NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR

The National Security Advisor is an influential position in the Executive Office of the President who serves at the pleasure of the President. The advisor is appointed to lead the National Security Council, a body that is designed to facilitate collaboration and coordination between the Defense Department, the State Department, and the intelligence community. The power of the office varies greatly between different administrations, since its influence depends on the President's preferred style of governing national security matters. No inherent powers come with the

role. One example of a highly influential National Security Advisor is Henry Kissinger, who served President Nixon between 1969 and 1975. He helped Nixon end the Vietnam War and ease tensions with the Soviet Union and China, but his legacy remains controversial due to his alleged involvement in several coups and war crimes. President Trump has so far had four different men (Michael Flynn, H.R. McMaster, John Bolton, Robert O'Brien) serve in the role, more than any other President during his first three years in office.

McMaster's Tenure

During his time as National Security Advisor, McMaster pushed for sending more U.S. troops to fight in Afghanistan and for more military pressure on North Korea in the midst of rising tensions with the Kim regime in 2017. Much like James Mattis nine months later, McMaster's conviction in overseas U.S. military engagement ultimately came to odds with President Trump's skepticism toward having American troops abroad, leading to the end of his tenure as National Security Advisor after just over one year on the job.

Unlike other Trump administration officials, McMaster also expressed concern about Russian interference in the 2016 General Election even while serving as National Security Advisor. McMaster said it was "incontrovertible" that Russia interfered in the last election—a statement that drew a sharp rebuke by President Trump on Twitter.



Photo Credit: Associated Press

CYBERWAR AND SECURITY

Many national security specialists, including McMaster, have warned of an emerging threat: cyberwarfare. Modern technology provides great opportunities for our civilization, but it has also opens up a new competitive arena of geopolitics—one that requires significant investment in technological capabilities to ensure our national security.

Is the U.S. Losing the Artificial Intelligence Arms Race?



This analysis by James Johnson, published by The Conversation, highlights concerns in the U.S. defense community that China or Russia could surpass the U.S. in technological capabilities. Although the U.S. still appears to be ahead in the cybersphere, there are some indicators that our advantage is waning, with potentially significant consequences for the geopolitical balance of power.

Acting DNI Maguire describes 'cyber war' as greatest threat to the country



This article by the Hill reports on testimony by Joseph Maguire, the acting Director of National Intelligence, who described cyber war as the "number one threat" to U.S. national security. He added that cyber wars with geopolitical rivals

China and Russia are "taking place right now" and that it was crucial to protect the 2020 election from foreign interference.

In Cyberwar, There Are No Rules

Tarah Wheeler, writing for Foreign Policy, examines the threats of cyberwar. She argues that the lack of predictability and precedent make this kind of warfare very dangerous. Wheeler goes on to call for "digital Geneva Conventions" to set rules for cyberwar conduct. Without such standards, she fears, we could end up in "a devastating war launched by a few anonymous keystrokes."



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Do you agree with H.R. McMaster that the U.S. military is an important tool to spread American values and advance peace around the world?

Why do you think most of the world seems to prefer U.S. global leadership as opposed to having China be the leading world power?

Would you say it is good to have the U.S. as the world's sole superpower or is it better to have multiple countries competing over geopolitical dominance?

Are cyberwars really a serious threat to our national security? If yes, how do we make sure we stay at the forefront of technological development?

How do you think McMaster's background in the military impacted his decision-making as National Security Advisor for President Trump?

If you were President, would you give your National Security Advisor a lot of influence over foreign policy or would you rather leave more power in the Departments of State and Defense?

This classroom resource guide is provided by WorldOregon and designed to encourage discussion about subjects related to H.R. McMaster's talk at the 2020 International Speaker Series. The guide is meant to be purely informative; WorldOregon does not endorse any views or opinions expressed in it.



written by Aineias Engstrom

With thanks to the following organizations for resources used:

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