

# Nicholas Kristof

## U.S. Global Leadership: History or Future?

After the Second World War, the United States was perhaps the single most important factor in setting up **multilateral institutions** meant to encourage **international cooperation** and prevent another global conflict. American visionaries like Eleanor Roosevelt and Edward Stettinius were at the forefront of creating the first truly global intergovernmental organization (the United Nations), a document outlining the innate rights of every individual (the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), and a framework for promoting international development (the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund).

Over the decades, some of these institutions, especially those designed to promote development, have fallen short of their aims and received their fair share of criticism. But nonetheless, they all reflect a vision of an international community centered on freedom, justice, and peace – a vision shaped by America extending the goal of a “more perfect union” beyond its borders. Some have called for finding new solutions to better promote these values and to take on new global challenges such as climate change.

Others criticize the U.S.’s role on the world stage, arguing that domestic challenges should take precedent over international engagement or that putting resources into multilateral institutions has not yielded a good return on investment, especially considering that they restrict our ability to act independently. After all, there are opportunity costs to making monetary and diplomatic investments around the world. The U.S. could instead put more resources into strengthening our own capabilities. Under the banner of “America First,” the Trump administration has sought to do just that, by increasing unilateral military strength, cutting funds for international organizations, and pulling out of multilateral treaties like the Paris Climate Accords or the Iran Nuclear Agreement.



*Photo retrieved from <http://www.northrop.umn.edu/events/nicholas-kristof>*

Critics of the current foreign policy might say that this approach means ceding global leadership and approaching international affairs with a purely nationalistic, competitive mindset, casting aside the importance of universal (and American) values such as peace, human rights, and international development. They argue that international cooperation, despite often being an uphill battle, has strengthened America and turning inward would be detrimental both to our interests and these universal values.

New York Times columnist, CNN contributor, and two-time Pulitzer Prize Winner **Nicholas Kristof** is a vocal supporter of these values and is deeply troubled by recent developments. His work as a journalist has taken him from the brutal crackdown on the 1989 pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square to the horrific genocide during the 2004 conflict in Darfur, shaping his view that there is a fundamental need to stand up for human rights and international cooperation. Thanks to his courageous reporting over more than three decades, the Oregon native has become an influential voice on global affairs and America’s role on the international stage.

“Compassion isn’t a sign of weakness, but a mark of civilization”

Nicholas Kristof

# U.S. Reputation Abroad

**Little overall change to U.S. image in Trump's second year, but in most countries a dip from Obama era**

Favorable views of U.S.

End of Obama presidency*			'17-'18 Change	Obama-'18 Change
	2017	2018		
Mexico	66	30	+2	<b>-34</b>
Netherlands	65	37	-3	<b>-31</b>
Germany	57	35	-5	<b>-27</b>
Canada	65	43	-4	<b>-26</b>
Sweden	69	45	-1	<b>-25</b>
France	63	46	-8	<b>-25</b>
Italy	72	61	-9	<b>-20</b>
Indonesia	62	48	-6	<b>-20</b>
Brazil	73	50	+5	<b>-18</b>
Spain	59	31	+11	<b>-17</b>
UK	61	50	0	<b>-11</b>
Argentina	43	35	-3	<b>-11</b>
Philippines	92	78	+5	<b>-9</b>
Australia	60	48	+6	<b>-6</b>

Japan	72	57	67	<b>+10</b>	-5
Tunisia	42	27	37	<b>+10</b>	-5
South Korea	84	75	80	<b>+5</b>	-4
Poland	74	73	70	-3	-4
Nigeria	66	69	62	<b>-7</b>	-4
South Africa	60	53	57	<b>+4</b>	-3
Greece	38	43	36	<b>-7</b>	-2
Hungary	62	63	63	0	-1
Israel	81	81	83	<b>+2</b>	+2
Kenya	63	54	70	<b>+16</b>	+7
Russia	15	41	26	<b>-15</b>	<b>+11</b>

\*Obama presidency figures are based on the most recently available data for each country between 2014 and 2016.

Note: Significant changes in **bold**.

Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey, Q17a.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

According to a 2018 Pew Research survey, the United States' reputation has declined in many countries during Donald Trump's presidency, especially in Europe and Latin America. This could have serious implications on the world stage as it might become more difficult to find allies willing to help advance our values and interests.

## Public Opinion on Global Engagement

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.

**34.2%** 

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

**29.8%** 

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

**18.1%** 

... promoting and defending democracy around the world.

**17.9%** 

Source: EGF

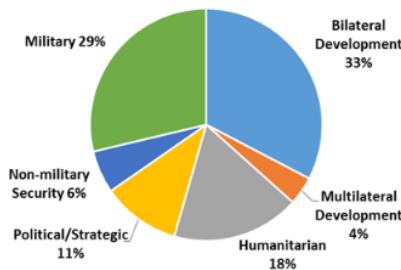
An opinion poll by the Eurasia Group surveyed the American public about different U.S. foreign policy approaches to achieve and sustain peace. There was no majority for any of the four offered positions, but the most frequently given answer favored less international engagement. More than a third of Americans believe peace is most likely if the U.S. turns inward and focuses on domestic policy rather than foreign intervention.

## U.S. Foreign Aid Expenditures

**\$49B**

Total U.S. Foreign Aid (2017)

Source: Congressional Research Service



U.S. Foreign Aid Composition (2017)

**1.2%**

Foreign Aid as Percentage of the Federal Budget (2017)

# Literature by Kristof

## Opinion: Trump Takes Incoherence and Inhumanity and Calls It Foreign Policy

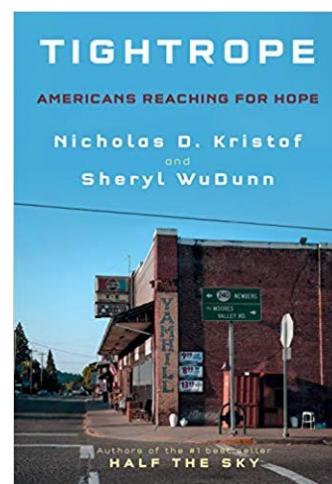
This scathing critique of the Trump administration's foreign policy calls out the inconsistency of the President's decisions, specifically on Middle Eastern policy. Kristof writes that Trump will be most remembered for his actions on the world stage, which he describes as "callow, reckless and indifferent."

## Opinion: World Leaders Once Made Miracles, and Can Again

Here, Kristof recalls the success of global humanitarian programs led by the U.S. and its European allies in the 2000s. Similar programs, he believes, are once again needed today and should be at the center of renewed American leadership on the world stage.

## Tightrope: Americans Reaching for Hope

Kristof has written several books in collaboration with his wife Sheryl WuDunn. The couple's latest work *Tightrope* was published in January 2020 and explores the "crisis in working-class America" by tracing the biographies of some of Kristof's childhood friends from his native Yamhill, Oregon.



# Other Voices on the Issues

## The Anti-Liberal Moment

**Vox** This article by Vox's Zack Beauchamp gives a detailed overview of the criticism that has come down on liberalism from both the left and the right. It also argues that liberals have so far not found a good response to their critics on the political fringes.

## Competitive Multilateralism: Adapting Institutions to Meet the New Geopolitical Environment

**B** This report by scholars at the Brookings Institution suggests a way of reconciling the current liberal world order with the reality of increasing nationalism and great power rivalry, using a framework they call "competitive multilateralism" with "layered and flexible institutions" and more room for competition within the multilateral landscape.

## What a World Without U.S. Leadership Looks Like

On this podcast by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, Ivo Daalder and James M. Lindsay highlight the need for continued U.S. global leadership on the world stage in order to sustain liberal international institutions. They also evaluate the impacts of what they see as an abdication of leadership by the Trump administration.

## Why Save the United Nations?

On this podcast, Catherine Bertini, former Executive Director of the UN World Food Programme, and global governance expert Thomas Weiss examine the role of the United Nations in international relations and international development. They discuss what the future holds for the U.N. and why the U.S. should take the lead in reforming the institution.

# Discussion Questions

Do you agree with Nicholas Kristof that the U.S. should espouse to provide global leadership? Or are we no more responsible for the rest of the world than any other country?

Has the U.S. invested too much in foreign aid, considering there are many unresolved issues here at home and there is no guarantee that foreign aid will be effective?

Do you find it troubling that America's reputation seems to be on the decline in most Western countries?

How do you think Kristof's experiences reporting on the Tiananmen Square protests and the genocide in Darfur shaped his view of the world?

How do journalists and writers like Kristof help inform public opinion and spur political action through their work?

This classroom resource guide is provided by WorldOregon and designed to encourage discussion about subjects related to Nicholas Kristof'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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