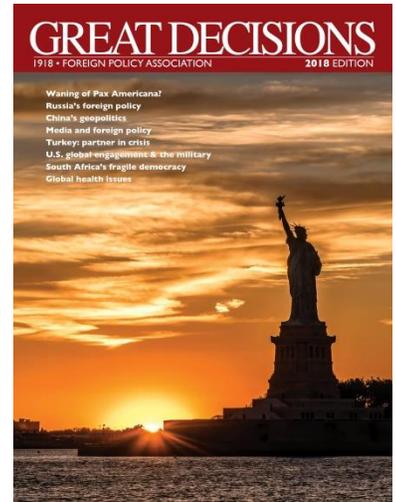




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2018 Great Decisions Topics

1. The waning of Pax Americana

During the first months of Donald Trump's presidency, the U.S. began a historic shift away from Pax Americana, the liberal international order that was established in the wake of World War II. Since 1945, Pax Americana has promised peaceful international relations and an open economy, buttressed by U.S. military power. In championing "American First" isolationism, President Trump has shifted the political mood toward selective U.S. engagement, where foreign commitments are limited to areas of vital U.S. interest. Geopolitical allies and challengers alike are paying close attention.

2. Russia

Under President Vladimir Putin, Russia is projecting an autocratic model of governance abroad and working to destabilize liberal democracies. Russia caused an international uproar in 2016, when it interfered in the U.S. presidential contest. But Putin's foreign policy toolkit includes other instruments, from alliances with autocrats to proxy wars with the U.S. in Georgia, Ukraine and Syria. How does Putin conceive of national interests, and why do Russian citizens support him? How should the United States respond to Putin's attempts to spread right-wing authoritarianism?

3. China: economic power and geopolitics

Over the past several years, China has implemented an expansive strategy of economic diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. Where the United States has taken a step back from multilateral trade agreements and discarded the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), China has made inroads through initiatives like One Belt, One Road and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). What are China's geopolitical objectives? What do its actions mean for the international balance of power, and how should the United States respond?

4. Media and foreign policy

State and non-state actors today must maneuver a complex and rapidly evolving media landscape. Conventional journalism now competes with user-generated content. Official channels of communication can be circumvented through social media. Foreign policy is tweeted from the White House and "fake news" has entered the zeitgeist. Cyberwarfare, hacking and misinformation pose complex security threats. How are actors using media to pursue and defend their interests in the international arena? What are the implications for U.S. policy?

5. Turkey: a partner in crisis

Of all NATO allies, Turkey represents the most daunting challenge for the Trump administration. In the wake of a failed military coup in July 2016, the autocratic trend in Ankara took a turn for the worse. One year on, an overwhelming majority of the population considers the United States to be their country's greatest security threat. In the context of a worsening "clash of civilizations," even more important than Turkey's geostrategic position is what it represents as the most institutionally westernized Muslim country in the world.

6. U.S. Defense Budget

The United States is at a turning point when it comes to global engagement and the role of its military. Some argue for an "America First" paradigm, with a large military to match. Others envision a more traditional assertion of U.S. multilateral leadership. Still others favor greater restraint and cautious cooperation with emerging powers. What is the role of the U.S. military force, arms sales and security assistance in the shifting international system? How does the balance of capabilities in the U.S. foreign policy toolkit impact strategic engagement?

7. South Africa

The African National Congress (ANC) party has governed South Africa since the end of apartheid in 1994. But the party today suffers from popular frustration with President Jacob Zuma, and it faces growing threats from both left and right opposition parties, even as intraparty divisions surface. Given America's history of opportunistic engagement with Africa, there are few prospects for a closer relationship between the two countries. Meanwhile, a weaker ANC could lead to political fragmentation and a disturbing shift for this relatively new democracy.

8. Global Health

Global health has been an indisputable success story over the past 30 years. Action by countries, communities and organizations has literally saved millions of lives. Yet the international community is in no position to rest on its laurels. Global measures of health status have improved, but terrible inequalities persist and the world faces a mix of old and new challenges. This means the next several decades will be just as important—if not more so—than the last in determining wellbeing across nations.