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THE UNITED STATES' CURRENT AND FUTURE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED NATIONS

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CONTENTS

Introduction.....	2
Structure, Questions and Methodology.....	3
US Relations with the UN Under the Trump Administration	4
Sovereignty, confrontation and neglect	
More transactional, less strategic	
Money	
Human rights	
Unilateralism	
2017: Stability	
2018: Confrontation	
2019: Drift	
2020: Craft	
Scenarios: US Relations with the UN Under a Second Trump Administration 2021-2025.....	9
Scenarios: US Relations with the UN Under a Democratic Administration 2021-2025	13
References	17



INTRODUCTION

The United States is one of the United Nations' most important stakeholders. The UN was created at the initiative of the US after World War II. Washington provides the largest financial contribution to the UN's overall budget. The US hosts the UN's headquarters in New York. The UN Security Council sits at the apex of a 75-year old Rules Based International Order (RBIO) heavily devised, underwritten and anchored by the United States.

Consecutive US administrations up to 2016 broadly supported the post-1945 multilateral architecture and RBIO, which they saw as advancing US power and geostrategic interests.¹ The Trump Administration has broken away from this previous Beltway consensus. Since 2017, US foreign policy has become more transactional, mercantile, nationalist, and unpredictable, with a greater emphasis on sovereignty and a reduced focus on alliances. The Trump Administration, unlike its predecessors, has often seen the RBIO as constraining, rather than advancing, US national interests. It holds a global outlook that is more Hobbesian: a power-based international system with competition between states. The President has described this approach to the UN General Assembly as 'Principled Realism'.²

An important question for other UN Member States is whether this shift in US global outlook under the Trump Administration marks a four year aberration

from – or the new normal for – US foreign policy. The outcome of the 2020 Presidential election will be fundamental in determining this.

However, US foreign and multilateral policy is also changing in response to longer term domestic and geopolitical shifts. Internationally, the rise of new Great Powers and new global threats (such as climate change and artificial intelligence) have placed stresses on the post-1945 international system.³ Domestically, there is growing weariness amongst much of the US public regarding the global role of the US, and a feeling that the current international system does not always deliver for US interests. The Trump Administration has accelerated, but did not create, this dynamic.

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STRUCTURE, QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

Against this backdrop, this paper address three issues. First, the paper considers US policy and diplomacy towards the UN, particularly in New York, over the first three years of the Trump Administration. Second, the paper sets out how US policy and diplomacy towards the UN could develop under two post-2020 scenarios: (i) a second Trump Administration, or (ii) a new Democratic administration. Third, the paper provides suggestions for how both the UN Secretariat and UN Member States who see an effective UN – and a US commitment to multilateralism – as being in their national interests might respond to either post-2020 scenario in terms of their engagement with the US, and their wider diplomacy, in New York.

Specifically, the paper is structured in three main sections:

Part 1 - US relations with the UN under the Trump Administration

This section considers US policy towards the UN under the Trump Administration, including drawing comparisons with other US Administrations since the end of the Cold War.

Part 2 - Scenario 1: A Second Trump Administration 2021-2025

This section looks at how US relations with the UN – and the wider multilateral system and RBIO – could develop under a second Trump Administration. It also makes recommendations for how the UN, and US allies in Europe and Asia, might adapt their diplomacy at the UN.

Part 3 - Scenario 2: Democratic Administration 2021-2025

This section examines how US relations with the UN – and the multilateral system and RBIO – might develop under an incoming Democratic Administration (taking into account that not all Democratic candidates have the same foreign policy positions).

The analysis and recommendations in this paper are based on a series of interviews conducted between November 2019 and January 2020 with former senior US diplomats, former senior State Department officials (including at Deputy Secretary of State and Under Secretary of State level), former senior UN officials (including at Under Secretary-General level), current Ambassadors to the UN, foreign policy surrogates to Presidential campaigns, and leading experts, academics, journalists and think tankers specialising on the UN and/or US foreign policy (in both New York and Washington). All interviews were conducted on background, off-the-record and on a non-attributable basis: those interviewed are not disclosed. This paper reflects the views expressed by interviewees during the research. It does not represent the views of the United Nations University or the author. No opinion on the likely, or preferable, outcome of the 2020 Presidential election in the United States is presented. No judgement on US policy or diplomacy at the UN is made.



UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

PART 1

US RELATIONS WITH THE UN UNDER THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

US policy and diplomacy towards the UN

US policy towards the UN during the first three years of the Trump Administration has been characterized by five main themes.

I Sovereignty, confrontation and neglect

US policy towards the UN under the Trump Administration was characterized by interviewees as one of “neglect and withdrawal.” They highlighted that the US had cut funding to the UN Secretariat, agencies and field missions, and pulled-back from providing wider political leadership in New York. Many suggested that this had diminished US influence at the UN (see below). Politically, US diplomacy under the Trump Administration had become more nationalistic in tone – emphasising the sovereignty of nation States – and more confrontational in style. The US has displayed an increased tendency (also apparent, to an extent, under previous administrations) to use the UN as a platform for example setting and signposting, rather than as a mechanism to advance US foreign policy objectives or solve global challenges. An example of this approach was Nikki Haley’s commitment to “take names” of countries not supporting the US decision to move its embassy to Jerusalem.⁴

II More transactional, less strategic

Mirroring previous US administrations, the Trump Administration has adopted a ‘cherry picking’ approach at the UN, engaging with – or sidelining – the organization depending on US interests. One example of this is US policy towards the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), where the Administration has utilized the UN to advance its ‘maximum pressure’ and sanctions tracks while blocking UN Secretariat ambitions for a role on the political track.⁵ The Trump Administration has also adopted a more siloed approach to UN files than its predecessors. Interviewees comment that US policy positions at the UN often appear to reflect ideological impulses on specific dossiers, rather than an overarching US strategy towards the UN.

The Administration’s track record in utilizing the UN to advance US objectives has been mixed. Its biggest achievement is widely seen as its securing tough new UN sanctions on DPRK in 2017. In other instances, such as on Iran/shipping in the Gulf, it has been unable to secure support in New York. Some interviewees suggest this is due to the Administration’s failure to develop more strategic relationships to underpin its approach, or to provide wider leadership at the UN over the longer term.

III Money

The last three years has seen increased emphasis on financial costs in US diplomacy at the UN. The Administration has pushed for reductions to both the UN regular and peacekeeping budgets, and sometimes made US funding conditional on UN agencies/operations supporting US policy objectives, for example on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).⁶ One Ambassador to the UN interviewed bluntly describes US policy as “saving money over saving lives”.

IV Human rights

Reflecting a wider shift in US foreign policy since 2017, US diplomacy in New York and Geneva under the Trump Administration has placed more emphasis on advancing US interests and policies than on promoting US values.⁷ The US Mission to the UN has downplayed human rights institutionally (for example, withdrawing from the UN Human Rights Council) and behind the scenes (other Western missions bemoan a dilution of human rights in UN mandates as a result of the US Mission to the UN no longer being willing to push back against Russia and China). Separately, in some instances the Trump Administration has sought to use the UN system to advance socially conservative policies, such as rolling back support for women’s rights in the areas of sexual and reproductive health.⁸

V Unilateralism

While previous US Presidents have shared President Trump’s scepticism towards multilateralism, the main point of departure of the current Administration from its predecessors has been its withdrawal from the wider US/Western post-1945 alliance system which underpinned the creation of the UN. Interviewees report that the Trump Administration has worked more closely with Russia and China at the UN than its predecessors and that it has sometimes sidelined US allies and the P3, including by reducing consultations with the UK and France and by disagreeing with them within the Security Council (for example on Libya).

Phases of US diplomacy

Within these five broad themes, US diplomacy in New York has gone through four specific phases during the first three years of the Trump Administration.

I 2017: Stability

The first phase of US engagement with the UN under the Trump Administration was characterised by the dominance of Ambassador Nikki Haley – both in New York and within the US interagency process. This was a product of her Cabinet level status, close relationship with President Trump, and a vacuum in the US interagency foreign policy making process under then US Secretary of State Tillerson and National Security Adviser McMaster. Ambassador Haley is widely credited by other UN ambassadors for successfully ‘managing’ the White House, for developing a stable and non-confrontational US-UN relationship, for securing some important outcomes (in particular UN sanctions on DPRK), and for following a tough, more traditional Republican foreign policy stance towards Russia, Syria and Saudi Arabia. Ambassador Haley is also seen as having benefitted from a favourable international backdrop in 2017, including a Chinese government exasperated with DPRK, and a set of US allies willing to accommodate the new US Administration.

II 2018: Confrontation

The appointment of Mike Pompeo as Secretary of State and John Bolton as National Security Adviser in 2018 saw Washington exert greater control over US policy at the UN. US diplomacy in New York was also impacted by growing US-China bilateral tensions, a UN Security Council that remained divided on Syria, and emerging divisions between the US and its allies (for example, the decisions of the Trump Administration to move the US Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem and to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran). In her second year, Ambassador Haley also began to adopt a more ‘Trumpian’ approach, for example moving towards Jared Kushner’s position on the Middle East, taking a harder line on Iran, cutting UN funding (notably to UNRWA), and adopting more transactional relations with US allies. Interviewees report that relations between Ambassador Haley and Washington also began to fray (for example, the White House’s overruling of her early green-

light to the UN Secretary-General to appoint former Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad to lead the UN Mission in Libya).⁹

III 2019: Drift

The third phase of US relations with the UN – between Ambassador Haley’s resignation and the Senate’s confirmation of Ambassador Kelly Knight Craft as her successor – is described by several interviewees as a period of an absence of US leadership and influence in New York, including on major files such as Syria, Sudan and Yemen. Other UN member states privately report that the US Mission to the UN sometimes lacked positions on issues and limited itself to short statements in UN Security Council meetings.

IV 2020: Craft

The appointment of Kelly Knight Craft as Ambassador – combined with the appointment of Stephen O’Brien as National Security Advisor – marks the fourth phase of US relations with the UN under the Trump Administration. In interviews, other UN Ambassadors welcome Ambassador Craft’s personal commitment to the UN and interest in humanitarian issues (one contrasts Ambassador Craft’s style favourably to Bolton’s “burn it down” approach when he served in New York). They also report that Ambassador Craft has so far focused on mid-level dossiers (including Africa, where she co-hosted a UN Security Council mission to South Sudan), with US foreign policy on high-level files directed by Washington. Ambassador Craft’s appointment has appeared to galvanize US diplomacy in New York, but many interviewees say they expect continued drift in US diplomacy overall during the Trump Administration’s fourth year.



UN Photo/Mark Garten

Other Powers

One geopolitical impact of the US' pull-back at the UN under the Trump Administration has been an opening up of the landscape for other powers, notably China, to exert greater influence.

This has been particularly seen on economic and development issues. Those interviewed report that many UN Member States have moved away from Washington and towards Beijing over the last few years as – in the context of a developing G2 world – one pole (the US) has withdrawn whilst the other (China) has become more assertive. The recent success of China's candidate for the Food and Agriculture Organization, delivered with support from the African group, is an example.¹⁰ The contrast in US bilateral policy towards China, which has aimed

to constrain Beijing, and US multilateral policy, which has provided a platform for China to increase its influence, has also been widely noticed in New York. One ambassador describes the US as being “asleep at the wheel”. Another refers to it “shooting itself in the foot.”

To a lesser extent, Russia has similarly sought to take advantage from US pull-back in New York. For example, it secured the General Assembly's support for developing a cybercrime treaty, seen as an alternative to a 2001 Council of Europe Convention, which had US support.¹¹ As noted above, in some other areas US/Russia cooperation has improved under the Trump administration.

Fears not realised

The Trump Administration has not been as overtly *hostile* to the UN as many US allies feared at the start of 2017 – or as critical to the UN as it has been towards other multilateral structures, such as the World Trade Organization, European Union, Trans-Pacific Partnership, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. A complete break between the US and UN has not materialized. The US has disengaged, but not

withdrawn. Budgetary contributions have been reduced and delayed, but the UN has kept going.

Interviewees suggest that six factors have contributed to the Administration's relative restraint towards the UN. First, as noted, Ambassador Haley is widely credited by other Ambassadors in New York for effectively managing tensions. Second, Secretary-General Guterres is widely credited in having set as a personal priority the prevention of a break between the US and the UN. He is seen as having developed good relations with the White



House (as well as with Capitol Hill) and for having successfully worked with Ambassador Haley to package his reform agenda as a US win. Third, the UN Security Council demonstrated its value to the White House early on by delivering tough new UN sanctions on DPRK. Fourth, Congress has remained broadly supportive of the UN and continued to authorize funding. Fifth, while hostile to much of the UN system and its agencies, UN sceptics within the Trump Administration, such as former National Security Advisor John Bolton, have nevertheless

continued to recognise the value of the UN's core role on peace and security, particularly as delivered through the UN Security Council. Sixth, President Trump came to office familiar with the UN from his time in New York. He is considered to have, unlike his visits to other international meetings (such as NATO), enjoyed attending the General Assembly's General Debate. Those with first hand knowledge report that the President has privately referred to the UN's potential.

Points of continuity

While the Trump Administration has broken away from the previous Beltway consensus regarding the US role in anchoring the RBIO, there are points of continuity between the multilateral outlook of the current and previous US Administrations. First, President Trump has been the highest volume speaker of US anxieties towards multilateralism, but his predecessors have also seen the value of the UN as primarily being about promoting US interests, rather than global goods. Second, there has been continuity between the Obama and Trump Administrations in terms of each wanting to limit the global burdens on the US. Their policies on how to deliver this have differed – the Obama Administration supported the post-1945 RBIO and pressed the UN and other international organisations to do more, whereas the Trump

Administration's isolationist tendency is more in line with the US foreign policy tradition of the 1920s and 1930s – but there is some consistency regarding their overall objectives. These are likely to continue under the next US administration too.

Third, whilst interviewees report that US leverage at the UN has declined at a faster pace over the last three years as a result of the multilateral outlook of the Trump Administration, the overall trajectory of other powers providing less automatic deference to the US is a longer term trend. Interviewees stressed that the US now needed to compete with others for influence at the UN in the way it did not have to do during the unipolar world of the 1990s and 2000s – and that this dynamic would continue under any future US administrations (whether Republican or Democrat).



PART 2

US RELATIONS WITH THE UN UNDER A SECOND TRUMP ADMINISTRATION 2021-2025

This section examines how US relations with the UN might develop under the possibility of a second Trump Administration from 2021-2025. It also makes recommendations for how US allies and the UN might respond to this.

Scenarios

There are three broad scenarios for how US policy towards the UN could develop under a second Trump Administration.¹²

Scenario I - Continuation

Under the first scenario, US policy follows the broad contours of the last three years – relative neglect/disinterest, transactional diplomacy and cuts. The UN becomes even more of a platform for rhetoric than outcomes. The coherence of the P3 and wider US alliances continue to decline. US foreign policy increasingly sidelines the UN (interviewees suggest possible US actions could include withdrawing from the SDGs or other multilateral accords and frameworks, or attempting to push through its new Middle East Peace Process initiative in a way that sidesteps existing UN resolutions). Continued US pull-back sees China and Russia becoming more assertive. Marginalization of the UN accelerates movement towards a G2 world, while growing US-China confrontation risks paralysing the UN Security Council and multilateral system.

Scenario II - Shift towards more engagement

Under a second scenario, there is a gearshift in US policy towards the UN with a more positive US stance and step change in US leadership and engagement. Washington sees the UN as a useful mechanism in managing China and in promoting greater burden sharing. The US begins to open up funding, pushes

back against growing Chinese influence, and rebuilds alliances. This scenario would in some ways echo the shift seen during President George W. Bush's second Administration following the US-UN rupture under the 2003 Iraq War.

Scenario III - All-out assault

Under this scenario, US policy towards the UN, multilateralism and US alliances hardens further as the President – constrained over his first four years – feels vindicated by reelection and takes a more hostile stance. National sovereigntists in the Administration argue that the UN Charter should be disregarded whenever a state disagrees with it. The US launches an all-out assault on the UN budget, shutting off funds, demanding the closure of peacekeeping operations and/or shifting from assessed to voluntary funding. The Western alliance structure is further undermined, possibly through new US conditionality on Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty or even withdrawal from NATO. There is greater US-Russia alignment and the UN would become more of a 'mop-up'/delivery organisation (for example to deliver a deal on Syria).

Based on interviews, the first scenario is widely seen as the most likely, though some cautioned that a harder stance (scenario iii) was also a real possibility. The UN and Member States should base their planning on scenario (i) whilst also being alive to scenario (iii). No one interviewed judged that scenario (ii) was likely (but it is possible).



Recommendations for UN Member States supportive of multilateralism

Under a second Trump Administration, interviewees identified four steps that UN Member States should take to support the UN and multilateral system – and to encourage continued (limited) US engagement in New York.

First, in their engagement with the US, states should avoid making ideological arguments in favour of multilateralism and instead focus on:

- a. securing case-by-case US engagement with specific UN agencies and missions (rather than seeking larger/ ideological US commitments);
- b. stressing the immediate, short term pay-offs to the US from UN action - how it advances 'America First' (not global goods); and
- c. underlining the financial savings to the US from UN action – how the US can get what it wants more cheaply (and easily) by acting through the UN.

In short, US allies would need to thread a diplomatic needle in terms of their engagement with the US: simultaneously adopting harder-edged, more transactional diplomacy whilst also continuing to persuade the US of the value of engaging in New York.

Second, to manage and mitigate US pull-back more widely in New York, US allies should:

- encourage a wider section of the UN membership to speak up for conflict prevention and human rights (to fill the vacuum);
- develop coalitions of middle powers to advance multilateralism – for example, building on the recent French-German 'Alliance for Multilateralism' initiative;¹³
- adopt united European, EU and 'E3' positions to maximise Europe's impact and influence;¹⁴ and
- more generally, manage their ambitions – and accept that multilateralism may work in a smaller field over the next four years. Proponents of multilateralism should focus on safeguarding multilateral measures in areas that matter most to their national interests (e.g. nuclear proliferation) and to UN core objectives, rather than seeking to expand the multilateral map.¹⁵

Third, US allies should underline to Washington the importance of seeing action at the UN through a China prism. Allies should speak frankly about the ground Beijing has gained as the US has withdrawn



but underline too that China is not yet proactively shaping the UN Security Council agenda – and the importance of the US holding this space. They might further caution against growing bilateral US-Chinese confrontation paralysing the multilateral system, point out the advantages to the Administration in developing the UN Security Council as a channel for US-China cooperation (given their wider tensions), and urge Washington and Beijing to find ways to

use the UN to manage their differences (acting as an off-ramp for crises) and to maintain cooperation on multilateral issues (such as non-proliferation).

Fourth, pick up the check. Maintaining multilateralism as the US withdraws (and focuses on costs) will require European and Asian countries to take on more burden sharing.

Recommendations for the UN Secretariat

Interviewees warned that the UN would need to adopt a careful posture during a second Trump Administration, suggesting three possible steps. First, the UN should continue its reform and modernization agenda, advancing efficiency and budgetary savings in a visible manner. Second, it could pursue greater sub-national engagement within the UN system – for example, bringing global

city mayors together on climate change (although this could also risk ire over sovereignty). Third, the UN should focus on its core agenda, stay below the radar on divisive issues, avoid direct disagreements with Washington, focus on adding value on issues where the White House is less engaged (e.g. Africa), and look to reassert itself more widely in 2025.



PART 3

US RELATIONS WITH THE UN UNDER A DEMOCRATIC ADMINISTRATION 2021-2025

This final section examines how US policy and diplomacy at the UN might develop under a Democratic Administration from 2021 to 2025. It also makes recommendations on how the UN and UN Member States that support multilateralism should respond.

US policy towards the UN under a Democratic Administration: Four Rs

In contrast to the differences between Democratic Presidential candidates on international economic and trade issues, interviews considered that each of the front runners for the Democratic nomination would likely **broadly** echo the approach of the Obama Administration in terms of US policy towards the UN on foreign/security policy. Each would (a) instinctively want to act more with allies, advance US values (as well as interests), and restore the RBIO; but (b) also see the UN as a delivery (rather than political) mechanism and demand greater burden sharing by others. Any Democratic President would likely be supported by an internationalist foreign policy team, with the Democratic foreign policy establishment predominantly centrist and likely to serve any nominee.

The main point of difference brought out in interviews between more progressive and centrist Democratic candidates centers around willingness, bandwidth and approach to US military intervention overseas and global security leadership. Based on their public platforms so far¹⁶, a more centrist nominee would likely align with the approach of the Obama Administration – albeit with some diversity in their views.¹⁷ A more progressive Democratic Administration would (a) place more emphasis on shifting the terms of US engagement with the world, including by reducing US military commitments

and being generally more disciplined in terms of ends and means¹⁸, and (b) show greater ambition to reform – not only to restoring – the post-1945 international architecture.

Any incoming Democratic administration will face a different domestic and international landscape to 2016. Internationally, it will inherit a RBIO that has not yet adapted to the rise of new Great Powers (especially China) and new threats (such as climate change and artificial intelligence). Domestically, an incoming administration's ability to exert US multilateral leadership could be impacted by continued political polarization, and a US public weary of international commitments. A progressive administration with an ambitious domestic reform agenda could also show less will or ability to engage internationally – and may look more to the UN, other multilateral institutions and US allies to do more instead.

Finally, the 2020 electoral outcome could impact the multilateral outlook of a future Democratic administration. The size of the electoral college win and which states were carried (and by how much), could affect the extent that a future Democratic President is willing and able to lean into multilateral structures, such as returning to Paris and Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Recommendations for an incoming Democratic Administration

In line with the above, the UN (and wider multilateral) orientation of an incoming Democratic Administration is likely to involve four Rs: **re-asserting** US power and leadership, **resurrecting** US alliances and **restoring** and **reforming** the RBIO. To achieve these goals, an incoming Administration should have three strategic objectives:¹⁹

I To invest in alliances and international organisations, seeing US power as amplified by working with others;

II

To address the challenge from the rise of new Great Powers, including by acknowledging that the era of US unipolar power, and automatic deference by others to the US leadership, has passed with Washington no longer being 'the only big kid on the block'. The US will need to invest more in working within the UN system to maintain a strong US voice, as well as to channel, not oppose, growing Chinese engagement; and

III To reform the RBIO so it is more fit for purpose to address contemporary challenges (this will also be important in securing US public support) – and to do so whilst the US and its allies are still able to largely shape the global rules of the road. An incoming Democratic leadership should see the end of Trump Administration as the start of a process of resurrecting multilateralism, not the end of it.

A **diplomatic strategy** to deliver these objectives should be based on seven elements.²⁰

First - Messaging.

An early Presidential speech will be important in setting out the Administration's approach. This will need to be supported by early, senior outreach to both US allies (e.g. in Europe and Asia) and the wider UN membership (e.g. in Africa and Latin America). The Administration should give five headline messages:

- a. the US is an international law-abiding, rules-obeying, stability-seeking nation;
- b. the US holds values and principles that overlap with UN;
- c. UN Member States can count on the US to uphold those values;
- d. the US approach will be 'how can we make the international system work' not 'how can we dismantle it'; and
- e. the US recommits to the alliance system.

Given constraints on it detailed above, the Administration will also need to **manage the expectations**, which may be very high, of other UN Member States for what it can deliver. It should also be **clear in its early engagement what it expects from allies** as it recommits the US to alliances and multilateralism. Cooperation in dealing with the rebalancing of international power towards Asia should top this list.

Second - This messaging should be supported by a series of early signals and

statements of intent regarding US re-commitment to the UN, multilateralism and US alliances.

It will be particularly important to reassert traditional US positions on human rights as well as support for the Sustainable Development Goals (important for developing countries).

Third - The administration should take more specific steps to reassert US leadership at the UN.

These might include:

- paying outstanding US financial dues;
- engaging more directly on the implementation of UN reform;
- rejoining the Human Rights Council;
- putting forward experienced US candidates for senior UN roles with serious lobbying strategies in support;
- rebooting and reenergizing the P3, P5 and UN Security Council. In particular, an incoming Administration should work within the P5 to set up UN diplomatic wins; and
- working collaboratively within the UN to address new global threats – such as cyber and pandemics. In particular, there could be value in the US looking for an international moment to address, and fix rules of the road, on artificial intelligence.²¹

Fourth - Reestablish US leadership of the wider multilateral system through:

- going back into **Paris Climate Agreement** and leading a **new US climate initiative** that goes beyond Paris;
- working with allies to launch new multilateral efforts, for example on **Iran** and **DPRK**;
- reforming the **International Monetary Fund** and/or **World Bank**;

- reasserting US leadership on **values and human rights**, including through the Human Rights Council, supporting activists, and focusing on accountability. The new Administration could drop US opposition to the International Criminal Court (even if it cannot support it).

Fifth - Domestic support.

US support for multilateralism over the longer term will depend on US public support. A new administration will want to demonstrate to US citizens how multilateralism advances US interests. Highlighting the extent to which UN peacekeeping reduces the cost and need for US military engagement abroad could be one such area.

Sixth - Internal wiring.

An incoming Administration should look at developing a comprehensive inter-agency strategy on the UN and multilateralism to ensure a joined-up strategic approach. Organizationally it might consider increasing staffing in the International Organizations Bureau within the State Department, and restoring the role of US Permanent Representative in New York to Cabinet status.

Above all, an incoming administration will need to develop a **new overarching vision** for the future of the UN and RBIO that reflects the changed international landscape since 2016. This will require the Administration to carefully think through three issues in particular:

- a. which global public goods – including for US voters – require a multilateral approach to be delivered;
- b. handling China. The US will need to think through the trade-offs it is prepared to make as China's influence grows in New York, and which issues it is prepared to de-emphasise, in order to maintain core UN elements and UN values that advance its national interest; and
- c. how to de-link reforms to trade and neoliberal economic global structures (which concern US voters) from the UN's core role on international security that advances US national security interests, US influence and broader values across the US and its allies.

Recommendations for UN Member States supporting multilateralism

Based on interviews, UN Member States that welcome a more multilateral approach from an incoming Democratic Administration should adopt the following actions to support this (the UN Secretariat should consider adopting some – but not all – of these too).

First, adopt **realistic expectations**. An incoming Administration will not be unequivocally multilateral in all aspects and will, like all administrations, operate within domestic constraints.

Second, take responsibility and **proactively** develop and share ideas with the new Administration on re-invigorating multilateralism and the RBIO. Ideas suggested include a new UN green initiative focused on new technology and efficiency, testing US appetite to resuscitate the UN Security Council reform process, and advancing sub-national UN work.

Third, **help the US come back** to the UN through: (a) more burden sharing; (b) advancing UN modernization and reform; (c) creating the right UN environment (for example, the election of certain countries would make it easier, or harder, for US to rejoin the HRC); and, above all, (d) giving a new Administration some early wins to show multilateralism delivers more for US interests than US diplomacy under the Trump Administration.

Finally, it would be in the national interest of US allies – as predominantly middle and smaller powers whose national interests are advanced by an effective RBIO – to urge an incoming US administration to reach an overall understanding with **China** that embeds and advances a reformed RBIO as an alternative to growing US-China confrontation, marginalization of global multilateral architectures and a return to an international landscape dominated by Great Power rivalry.

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- 2 “Remarks by President Trump to the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly,” The White House, issued on 26 September 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-73rd-session-united-nations-general-assembly-new-york-ny/>
- 3 For example, see Eleonore Pauwels, *The New Geopolitics of Converging Risks: the UN and Prevention in an Era of AI* (New York: United Nations University, 2019), <https://cpr.unu.edu/the-new-geopolitics-of-converging-risks-the-un-and-prevention-in-the-era-of-ai.html>
- 4 Ambassador Haley tweeted at 11.08 pm on 19 December 2017: “At the UN we’re always asked to do more & give more. So, when we make a decision, at the will of the American ppl, abt where to locate OUR embassy, we don’t expect those we’ve helped to target us. On Thurs there’ll be a vote criticizing our choice. The US will be taking names.” *Foreign Policy* magazine quoted an email from Ambassador Haley to other UN Ambassadors regarding the upcoming UN vote: “As you consider your vote, I want you to know that the President and U.S. take this vote personally ... The President will be watching this vote carefully and has requested I report back on those countries who voted against us. We will take note of each and every vote on this issue.” in Colum Lynch, “Haley Warns Diplomats on Jerusalem: Trump Is Watching You”, *Foreign Policy*, 19 December 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/12/19/haley-warns-diplomats-on-jerusalem-trump-is-watching-you/>
- 5 In December 2017, UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman visited Pyongyang for a “policy dialogue”. The visit was to also potentially pave the way for a political role by the UN Secretary-General, which was later blocked by the United States.
- 6 See Laura Hillard and Amanda Shendruk, “Funding the United Nations: What Impact Do U.S. Contributions Have on UN Agencies and Programs?”, *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2 April 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/article/funding-united-nations-what-impact-do-us-contributions-have-un-agencies-and-programs>; Robbie Gramer and Colum Lynch, “Trump Stealthily Seeks to Choke Off Funding to U.N. Programs”, *Foreign Policy*, 2 October 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/02/trump-stealthily-seeks-to-choke-off-funding-to-un-programs/>
- 7 In a speech to State Department staff in May 2017 on US foreign policy, former US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson commented that “I think it is really important that all of us understand the difference between policy and values ... Our values around freedom, human dignity, the way people are treated – those are our values. Those are not our policies ... In some circumstances, if you condition our national security efforts on someone adopting our values, we probably can’t achieve our national security goals ... If we condition too heavily that others just adopt this value we have come to over a long history of our own, it really creates obstacles to our ability to advance on our national security interests our economic interests” in Josh Lederman, “Tillerson calls for balancing US security interests, values”, *Associated Press*, 3 May 2017, <https://apnews.com/7aff2131d7b4b10b2c84b89c721b6c9>
- 8 See Jessica Glenza, “US effort to remove ‘sexual health’ from UN agreement may violate law, say senators”, *The Guardian*, 30 October 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/oct/30/trump-administration-un-sexual-reproductive-health-senators-letter>
- 9 See Colum Lynch, “Diplomats: Nikki Haley Greenlighted U.N.’s Hiring of Salam Fayyad Before She Blocked It”, *Foreign Policy*, 11 February 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/02/11/diplomats-nikki-haley-greenlighted-u-n-s-hiring-of-salam-fayyad-before-she-blocked-it/>
- 10 See Colum Lynch and Robbie Gramer, “Outfoxed and Outgunned: How China Routed the U.S. in a U.N. Agency”, *Foreign Policy*, 23 October 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/23/china-united-states-fao-kevin-moley/>
- 11 Ellen Nakashima, “U.N. votes to advance Russian-led resolution on a cybercrime treaty”, *The Washington Post*, 19 November 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/un-votes-to-advance-russian-led-resolution-on-a-cybercrime-treaty/2019/11/19/fb6a633e-0b06-11ea-97ac-a7ccc8dd1ebc_story.html
- 12 Based on the views of interviewees.
- 13 On 26 September 2019, during the High-Level Week of the UN General Assembly, France and Germany organized an ‘Alliance for Multilateralism’ even alongside Canada, Mexico, Chile, Singapore and Ghana. For more information see “Alliance for Multilateralism”, French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, accessed 12 February 2020, <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/united-nations/alliance-for-multilateralism-63158/>
- 14 The ‘E3’ or ‘European 3’ are informal meetings of France, Germany and the United Kingdom. This format has been used most intensively over the last few years on Iran. However, there have also been E3 discussions on other issues to.
- 15 See Richard Gowan, *Minimum Order: The role of the Security Council in an era of major power competition* (New York: United Nations University, 2018), <https://cpr.unu.edu/minimum-order.html>
- 16 As of 31 January 2020.
- 17 See “Candidate Trackers: Joe Biden, Pete Buttigieg and Amy Klobuchar”, Council on Foreign Relations, accessed 12 February 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/election2020/candidate-tracker/joe-biden>; <https://www.cfr.org/election2020/candidate-tracker/pete-buttigieg>; <https://www.cfr.org/election2020/candidate-tracker/amy-klobuchar>.
- 18 Senator Bernie Sanders, for example, has laid out a clear agenda for withdrawing the US from international military engagements abroad while engaging in a robust diplomatic way on Israel-Palestine, both of which could have a significant impact on how the US interacts with the multi-lateral system in some of the most conflict-prone parts of the world. Sen. Bernie Sanders, “Ending America’s Endless Wars”, *Foreign Affairs*, 24 June 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-06-24/ending-americas-endless-war>. Warren too has been critical of how liberal foreign policy has been implemented by the US in recent decades, suggesting that US engagement abroad should be focused less on the war on terror and more on equitable development. Sen. Elizabeth Warren, “A Foreign Policy for All”, *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-11-29/foreign-policy-all>.
- 19 Based on the views of those interviewed.
- 20 Based on the views of those interviewed.
- 21 For more detail, see: Eleonore Pauwels, *The New Geopolitics of Converging Risks: the UN and Prevention in an Era of AI* (New York: United Nations University, 2019), <https://cpr.unu.edu/the-new-geopolitics-of-converging-risks-the-un-and-prevention-in-the-era-of-ai.html>



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