

A photograph of the White House in Washington, D.C., viewed from a distance. The building is white with a prominent portico supported by columns. There are trees in the foreground and background, and a flagpole with the American flag is visible. A large blue diagonal shape is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the title text.

FOREIGN POLICIES OF THE 2016 US PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Overwhelmingly the major candidates in the 2016 US Presidential election are focused on foreign policy issues in the Middle East: particularly combating Islamic State and the threat of violent extremism.**
- **Most candidates advocate a more active and strident global leadership role for America, underpinned by a reinvigorated US military and a tougher leadership resolve when dealing with competitors and adversaries.**
- **China has become a security issue in this campaign and candidates' positions towards Beijing have considerably hardened.**

Australians should be attuned to how the debates between American presidential candidates may shape the foreign and defence policies of the next US President and a new US administration in 2017. Five months into the campaign, some key trendlines are beginning to emerge. Without exception the major candidates are critical of President Barack Obama's foreign policy and use of the military - although to varying degrees. All but two candidates would prioritise the reinvigoration of America's alliances, particularly in the Middle East. There is a growing consensus as to how the candidates would change US policy on Iran, China, and the problem of violent extremism in Iraq and Syria. Across the field foreign policies seem more hawkish and the candidates largely share the assessment that the US military needs to be reinvigorated. As the campaign progresses candidates will face more pressure to address the trade-offs and inconsistencies in their current foreign policy positions. But on current trajectories it is likely that the next president will seek more of America's allies and expect them to shoulder a greater burden for global security and defence. In this paper, we preview the foreign policy positions of selected major candidates in the US presidential election and consider the implications for American allies like Australia.

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Across the field of presidential candidates, there are calls for America to be stronger on the global stage and for the next President to show firmer resolve against adversaries and competitors.

Introduction

Foreign policy platforms rarely shape the outcomes of US presidential elections but the foreign policy views of the successful presidential candidate have every chance of shaping the world. Five months after the first candidacies were announced the foreign policy positions of the field are coalescing and several trends are noticeable. All of the candidates are critical of President Barack Obama's foreign policy legacy and use of the military - although to varying degrees. Largely, the candidates believe that Obama has weakened America's global strength by running down military capability and eroding the credibility of US deterrence. They argue that the next President must be more prepared to show resolve against adversaries and competitors: matching strong rhetoric with decisive military action when required. Most would reinvigorate the US military and increase defence spending. All but two candidates would prioritise the reinvigoration of America's alliances, particularly in the Middle East. There is also a growing consensus as to how the candidates would change US policy on Iran, China, and the problem of violent extremism in Iraq and Syria. These trendlines in the presidential election point to a likely shift in US foreign policy after the November 2016 election. This will have important implications for Australia.

Australia is peripheral to the mainstream presidential candidates thus far in the campaign, only having been mentioned briefly by former secretary of state Hillary Clinton, former Florida governor Jeb Bush, California businesswoman Carly Fiorina, and Senator Marco Rubio. In each case this was within the context of America's Asian allies. Only four of the major candidates are personally familiar with Australia: Secretary Clinton chief amongst them as architect of the US rebalance to Asia. Carly Fiorina visited Sydney in 2000, Donald Trump gave a series of speeches in Australia during 2011, and Ben Carson spent a year as chief neurosurgeon at a Perth hospital in 1983 (his first son was born in Australia). However most of the senior foreign policy experts advising the major candidates know Australia well and can speak to its place in US foreign policy, particularly within the context of East Asia.

To Australian observers of this presidential campaign three trends should be clear. The first is just how thickly the language of realism is spread through the speeches and stated policy positions of the candidates. Unsurprisingly, given how many Republican candidates there are, President Ronald Reagan's "peace through strength" mantra is invoked often. Secretary Clinton is also invoking more strident language on foreign policy, keen to distance herself from an incumbent widely perceived as weak in the face of foreign provocation. As a result the field has shifted firmly right on foreign policy matters: mostly pledging to increase US military capability, deal more toughly with competitors and adversaries, and demonstrate greater resolve in using decisive military force to secure US foreign policy goals. This strength abroad would be underpinned by economic strength at home. Though the candidates have varying views on how much the proliferation of American ideals and principles should influence foreign policy, they largely advocate for a more active

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and strident global leadership role for America. However the candidates are yet to precisely explain how their tougher and more active foreign policies would differ from President Obama's, or secure different outcomes to the various issues the United States faces. As the campaign progresses, candidates will face more pressure to address the trade-offs inherent in some of their positions, particularly those advocating for material increases in US defence spending.

The second clear trend in this campaign is how preoccupied candidates are with American foreign policy in the Middle East. Of primary concern is US foreign policy towards "radical Islam" and ISIS, as well as Iran. The candidates broadly advocate doing more to address the problems posed by ISIS and Syria: intensifying engagement with allies and partners in the Middle East, particularly Israel; taking a firm line with Russia and the Bashar al-Assad regime; arming moderate Syrian opposition; and ending the deal on nuclear weapons with Iran. Most candidates are wary of deepening US involvement in the Syrian conflict by deploying further ground combat forces. They are also deeply skeptical of the current president's policy of using limited force against ISIS. The candidates' preoccupation with the Middle East and ISIS in particular has been driven by rapidly changing public attitudes on international security: the 2015 Chicago Council Survey this year found a 15 per cent increase in Americans who view ISIS as a critical threat to US national security.¹

Finally this presidential election campaign shows that candidates are considerably hardening their positions on China. In the 2012 campaign China was mostly a trade issue: criticised for undermining US manufacturing jobs or for its devalued currency. Candidates like Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump still echo such trade concerns today but overall China has become a security issue for the 2016 presidential field.

This is because the US national security community overall has been hardening attitudes against China for more than a year now. In Washington there is an increasing concern about China's rise. US policy makers and their Asian allies are concerned about China's lack of responsiveness on issues like the South

China Sea and cybersecurity. More immediately Washington's language on China has sharpened after the cyber-hack on the US Office of Personnel Management that occurred earlier this year. Nearly 20 million Americans who hold or who have applied for government security clearances have received notifications that their personal details — sometimes including sensitive family details — have been compromised. This has transformed the cybersecurity threat emanating from China from an abstract issue to a deeply personal one for many in Washington, including those working on the campaign staff for the various presidential candidates.

Most candidates are now adopting a more uncompromising stance towards China. Governor Jeb Bush advocates tougher sanctions for cyber-theft, Senator Ted Cruz would push back against China's "concerted campaign of territorial expansion" by increasing arms sales to Taiwan, Senator Marco Rubio would take a tougher line on human rights violations, Donald Trump effectively advocates a trade war against China, and Secretary Hillary Clinton would sharpen aspects of the Obama rebalance to Asia. It is still too soon to outline the trajectory that the US rebalance to Asia might take under a new administration in 2017. It appears likely that absent any major change in the US–China strategic relationship, Washington's policies on Beijing will toughen considerably under the next president.

In all of this US alliances will be important to the candidates. Even Senator Rand Paul who advocates a less comprehensive US global engagement is now arguing for the intensification of some alliances. Most candidates seek to reinvigorate and strengthen US alliances, some specifically in the Asia–Pacific region. Few have articulated detailed plans for this and that detail is likely to only emerge in the early days of a new administration. But more hawkish policies across the board and plans to restrengthen the US military seem to be teamed with instinctive views that allies should burden-share, making it likely the next president will ask more of America's allies. In this paper, we preview the foreign policy positions of selected major candidates in the US presidential election and consider what implications they might have for US allies like Australia.

Jeb Bush: Republican Former Governor of Florida

Campaign watchers regard foreign policy as one of Governor Jeb Bush's most serious weaknesses. Despite finally admitting the Iraq War was a mistake, Bush has refused to extricate himself from his brother's foreign policy and has indicated he would employ Paul Wolfowitz as a top foreign policy advisor. Bush blames the Obama administration for "losing" Iraq after the success of the 2007 surge and sees Obama's weakness and decision to withdraw all American forces from Iraq in 2011 as responsible for the rise of ISIS. Bush opposes the nuclear deal with Iran and views bolstering America's alliance with Israel, including via the provision of sophisticated weapons, as the best way to "create a healthier deterrent effect."² Bush lists the military defeat of "radical Islam" as a central foreign policy aim, to be achieved through restored ties with Egypt and Saudi Arabia, support for Sunni and Kurdish fighters in Iraq, intensified air strikes, and a greater scope of action for existing ground troops.³ Perhaps learning from his brother's experience, he stops short of advocating an escalation of American ground forces in the region, though he proposes uniting "moderate" anti-Assad rebels in Syria. There is little explanation of how any of this would work — or of how it is different to what the Obama administration is currently doing. Instead, it relies on the familiar refrain that Bush could restore a type of Reagan-esque "credibility" to American diplomacy. His single-minded focus on "radical Islam" suggests hard limits to his understanding of foreign policy.

Bush's discussion of American alliances in the Asia–Pacific has been relatively limited on the campaign trail to date. Like Rubio, his underlying conception of America's role in the world is founded on a neoconservative agenda to project "American leadership" and "power" in defence of democratic principles.⁴ This means working closely with like-minded international partners as "good things happen when America is engaged with friends and allies, alert to danger, and resolved to deal with threats, before they become catastrophes."⁵ Yet how Bush would apply this framework to Asia is largely unexplained. Although he argues

that US allies in the region worry about "a lack of consistent American engagement" in the face of China's rising ambition, he has not discussed particular strategic challenges in any detail.⁶ Nor has he provided any clear indication of how he would address allied concerns, other than alluding to a need to rebuild American defence spending and to impose "super sanctions" on China as a "deterrent signal" against its cyber espionage.⁷ Bush has stated that "America again needs to lead ... and can't do it alone," meaning, in Asia, that the United States will "need to strengthen [its] relationship with Asian and Pacific allies like Japan and Korea and Australia as well as the Asian countries."⁸ But he offers no specific proposals on how Washington should go about strengthening its regional alliances and partnerships.

Bush has a single-minded focus on defeating "radical Islam" but stops short of arguing for US ground forces in Iraq and Syria

Hillary Clinton: Democrat Former Secretary of State and Senator, New York

As a former secretary of state, Hillary Clinton has the most established foreign policy stance of any candidate. Clinton was a popular secretary of state and during her tenure (2009–2013) she had few public disagreements with Obama on foreign policy. However, as the most likely Democratic presidential candidate Clinton is crafting her foreign policy stance with an eye on the general election rather than the primary. During her presidential campaign in 2008, Clinton positioned herself as more hawkish and trustworthy on foreign policy than Obama. In 2016 she appears to be doing the same, tacitly acknowledging Republican complaints that Obama has been too weak in the face of foreign aggression. As Republicans try to "out-hawk" each other during the primary and are driven to more extreme and untenable positions, Clinton is attempting to position herself as the "smarter hawk."

Clinton played a major role in formulating the Obama administration's Iran deal,

but since leaving office has said she regrets the United States' lack of support for the 2009 Green Revolution and is now promising a more aggressive stance towards Iran. She recently declared "I will not hesitate to take military action if Iran attempts to obtain a nuclear weapon," although she plans to maintain the framework of the nuclear deal.⁹ Clinton also supports increased military action against Assad — she was an early supporter of arming Syrian rebels — and backs more aggressive efforts to "stand up" to Vladimir Putin's annexation of Crimea.¹⁰ In both cases, she believes the Obama administration allowed the situation to get out of hand after she left office.

Clinton is a forceful proponent of American leadership and spent much of her time in the State Department advancing America's role as a Pacific power through the US rebalance to Asia. She is thus uniquely qualified among the presidential candidates to claim knowledge and experience of the Asia-Pacific and has a proven track record of supporting allies and partners across the region. Clinton reaffirmed the US-Japan alliance as the "cornerstone" of America's regional engagement, deepened Washington's military relationship with South Korea, updated the US-Australia alliance, reinvigorated security ties between America and the Philippines, and began the process of building a US-Vietnam strategic partnership.¹¹ While Republican candidates like Rubio, Bush, and Kasich would probably broadly endorse these foreign policy decisions, none has articulated a clearer vision to strengthen America's alliances and partnerships in the Asia-Pacific. Nor has any serious candidate outlined a better practical vision of a more strident US foreign policy stance to address China's growing assertiveness. Whereas most candidates have only spoken of linear efforts to strengthen bilateral alliances, Clinton has stressed the importance of building "a web of partnerships and institutions across the Pacific that is as durable and as consistent with American interests and values as the web we have built across the Atlantic."¹²

Ted Cruz: Republican Senator, Texas

Senator Ted Cruz has carefully distinguished his foreign policy from the Republican "establishment" positions embodied by the Bushes or John McCain, describing it as "neither full neo-con nor libertarian isolationist."¹³ Like all Republican candidates, Cruz regards US leadership as critical to maintaining a stable international order and contends that the foreign policy of the Obama-Clinton team has allowed America's alliances and partnerships to dangerously fray. Cruz invokes Reagan's pragmatic national interest-based approach, suggesting the United States can effectively champion freedom from the "bully pulpit" of the American presidency without having to make major military commitments abroad.¹⁴

Cruz has become one of the most vocal opponents of the Iran nuclear deal, which, he claims, will make "the Obama administration the world's leading financier of radical Islamic terrorism."¹⁵ But he has also opposed Obama's use of limited force in Syria. Cruz argues that military force should only be used to secure America's vital national security interests — not to spread democracy or undertake nation building — and maintains that when force is used it should be used overwhelmingly.¹⁶ Cruz is yet to outline detailed plans for the use of the US military to achieve foreign policy goals.

Similarly to other candidates, Cruz advocates a "strong global network of allies" backed by "the credible threat of [American] force" and promises to "revitalize" Washington's security commitments, noting "our friends no longer trust us and our enemies no longer fear us."¹⁷ His attitude towards alliances differs from that of Rubio and Bush insofar as he seems to favour narrower commitments to America's strategic partners. This places him somewhat closer to the libertarian

Cruz argues military force should only be used to secure America's vital national security interests – not to spread democracy or undertake nation building

views of Paul and Trump. For instance, Cruz argues that Washington should provide lethal military assistance to Ukraine, ballistic missile defences to Eastern Europe, and F-16 fighters to Taiwan. These are all measures designed to bolster US allies in their struggles against Russia and China.¹⁸ But he has not, however, spoken in favour of comprehensive efforts to strengthen all of America's security partnerships. Rather, Cruz has adopted former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's pragmatic advice to "[pick] allies wisely, support and reassure them — and then insist that they fulfil their promises and commit their resources,". This suggests that Cruz will demand more from America's allies than most Republican candidates.¹⁹ The only security partnership that Cruz has said should be "robustly and unambiguously" strengthened is the US–Israel alliance which he believes has been immorally weakened by Obama's relations with the Palestinians and Iran.²⁰ Cruz also justifies this on the grounds of American strategic interests, given that a more potent Israel would provide an effective constraint on Iranian power.²¹ Although Cruz has acknowledged that India, South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan are resisting China's "concerted campaign of territorial expansion," he has paid no real attention to America's Asian allies and partners — reflecting a European and Middle Eastern bias in his foreign policy thinking.²² Cruz's foreign policy has so far had little traction in the campaign, but it could become an important point of differentiation if he survives to the later stages of the race.

Carly Fiorina: Republican Businesswoman, California

Following her impressive performance during the second Republican debate, Carly Fiorina has rapidly emerged as a top-tier candidate in the presidential race. While the former CEO of Hewlett Packard has little foreign policy experience, Fiorina points out that she has met many world leaders throughout her corporate career and has advised the Pentagon on best business practices through the Defense Business Board.²³ Like most Republican candidates, she favours Reagan's foreign policy of "peace through strength" and is highly critical of Obama's weakness

against "bad actors" like Russia, China, and the Assad regime.²⁴ Yet, in contrast to more cautious Republicans like Cruz, Paul, Kasich, and even Trump, Fiorina advocates a muscular US foreign policy that has been criticised as "confrontational" and "belligerent."²⁵ Vowing to "confront [America's] adversaries," she has promised to push back against Putin's aggression by rebuilding the US Navy's European-based 6th Fleet, rebuilding missile defence systems in Poland, and conducting "aggressive military exercises" with the Baltic States.²⁶ Fiorina would cancel the Iran nuclear deal on her first day in office, favouring a tougher inspections and financial sanctions regime, and would "lead a coalition of Arab allies to defeat ISIS," including by arming Kurdish and Jordanian forces.²⁷

Perhaps more than any other presidential candidate, Fiorina is an ardent supporter of US exceptionalism and hopes to reaffirm America's position as "a unique nation in all of human history and on the face of the planet."²⁸ She backs massive efforts to rebuild the military and invest in naval capabilities, calling for a force of "50 Army brigades, 36 Marine battalions, between 300 and 350 naval ships, and an upgrade of 'every leg of the nuclear triad'."²⁹ She also wants Washington to invest more resources to "support" and "equip" its allies abroad, including Japan, Australia, and South Korea.³⁰ As far as America's Asia–Pacific alliances and partnerships are concerned, Fiorina has yet to outline what specific policies her administration would pursue. However, she has adopted a hardline stance on US–China relations, stating that she would have cancelled Xi Jinping's state dinner at the White House in response to China's growing cyber espionage, human rights abuses, and its construction of military outposts in the South China Sea.³¹ Fiorina sees alliances as central to American security and believes that the "defence of the security ... and character of our nation are inextricably linked."³²

John Kasich: Republican Former Governor of Ohio

A former governor of Ohio, John Kasich has emerged from relative obscurity and positioned himself as a moderate compared to the rest of the Republican field. He has more foreign policy experience than any other viable Republican candidate, having served on the House Armed Services Committee for eighteen years. However, he has so far avoided campaigning on foreign policy issues, instead building support around his domestic agenda of pragmatic fiscal conservatism. Kasich represents a more traditional Republican foreign policy perspective. He favours strengthening the US armed forces, supporting allies, and launching limited military action abroad.

Describing himself as a “cheap hawk,” Kasich believes in strengthening America’s armed forces — especially its naval and power projection capabilities — though he is more interested in budget efficiencies than redoubled spending.³³ On ISIS, he favours increased military action and American “boots on the ground” as part of a coalition of NATO and Arab states, though like all candidates he shies away from nation-building or drawn-out military commitments.³⁴ Kasich also supports American efforts to increase military assistance to Syrian rebels and Ukrainian forces, and calls himself a “strong and emotional supporter of Israel.”³⁵ Unlike most Republican candidates, with the exception of Rand Paul, he would not automatically tear up the Iranian nuclear deal, even though he thinks it is a “bad agreement.”³⁶ Kasich concurs with Obama’s view that sanctions could be reimposed in the event of any cheating by Tehran. More than any other Republican candidate except Trump, Kasich is skeptical of free trade deals, although he does support the Trans-Pacific Partnership.³⁷

Kasich argues that US alliances have “deteriorated” under Obama’s watch and “need to be rebuilt” to safeguard America’s security.³⁸ He believes the United States needs to “lead from in front” to make the world safe, but sees “allies [as] the backbone of our security because they are political and military

force-multipliers.”³⁹ Kasich has however said little about how he will strengthen America’s global network of alliances and he has been all but silent on policies regarding Asia–Pacific allies. To be sure, like Rubio, he has advocated sending US military forces to the South China Sea to signal strength to China, broadly supports a “stronger presence in the Western Pacific,” and notes that China is a partner on some issues and an adversary on others.⁴⁰ Yet Kasich has not discussed the wider strategic challenges facing America’s Asian partners. Nor, in any major speech, has he mentioned Japan, South Korea, Australia, or the Philippines by name. Broadly, while Kasich is in favour of renewing alliances through “respectful engagement,” “candor,” and “integrating allied needs” into a strengthened US military, he also argues strong alliances require that “all parties pull their own weight.”⁴¹

Rand Paul: Republican Senator, Kentucky

Senator Rand Paul invokes Reagan’s “peace through strength” like all Republican candidates, but he has a long record of departure from Republican orthodoxy on foreign policy issues. In recent months, he has tried to downplay these differences. Paul’s libertarian firebrand father Ron Paul, a Republican candidate in the 2008 and 2012 elections, built a movement around the principles of foreign policy isolationism, dismantling the banking system, and eliminating much of the federal government. The elder Paul was arguably the only serious anti-war candidate on either side of politics during these elections, and he won supporters on both the right and left for his stance on extricating the United States from conflict, including by ending its support for Israel. Rand Paul has sought to differentiate himself from his father with a invigorated focus on defence issues and a somewhat more hawkish stance. This includes remaking himself as a loyal supporter of Israel and reversing his view that US military spending should be decreased. This time around he argues that the US defence budget should increase by US\$190 billion over two years; in 2011 he argued it should be cut by 23 per cent.⁴² Despite these recent shifts in thinking, Paul has struggled to shed the “isolationist” label.

His instinctively, if moderate, libertarian stance on foreign policy is that the US should recognise its limits and preserve its might — a doctrine he refers to as “conservative realism.” Paul favours diplomacy over military force, distinguishing between “vital” and “peripheral” interests, and being guided by the principle to “first do no harm.”⁴³ Paul opposes many military interventions popular among other candidates and the Republican base, noting on the Arab Spring that “we need a hammer ready, but not every civil war is a nail.”⁴⁴ Paul supports air strikes against ISIS but cautions against further American action in Iraq or Syria, maintaining that the crisis requires “Arab boots from the region instead”. He cautions that toppling secular dictators in Muslim countries may exacerbate civil unrest to the benefit of extremists.⁴⁵ Although he thinks that Obama’s deal with Iran does not contain “significant leverage,” Paul, unlike most Republican candidates, would not “cut it up ... without looking to see whether or not Iran has complied” and believes that a diplomatic solution is better than any military option.⁴⁶

Although Paul’s campaign website declares that he would stand with America’s allies abroad, in reality his stance on alliances and partnerships is far from clear.⁴⁷ As recently as 2011 he advocated reducing troop commitments to Germany by 90 per cent. In 2010 he defended his father’s proposal to withdraw American soldiers from Japan and South Korea — noting that US forces could leave the Korean Peninsula if North Korea agreed to abandon its nuclear program and accept an inspections regime.⁴⁸ He has previously supported the doctrine of “offshore balancing” which advocates that Washington pull back from its overseas alliances and entanglements, and refocus its defence policy on strengthening the homeland.⁴⁹ Paul’s isolationist take on alliances has been muted in the current presidential race. But he has yet to reconcile his more hawkish stance with his views for America’s allies and partners, other than stating that he would “reinstitute the [Polish and Czech] missile-defence shields abandoned in 2009 [but] would make sure that the Europeans pay for it.”⁵⁰ Paul has not discussed America’s Asia-Pacific alliances in detail during the current presidential campaign. His primary outlook on the Asia-Pacific has been one centred on trade and economic issues, arguing that “free trade and technology should be the greatest carrot of [US]

statecraft.”⁵¹ Paul views improving trade ties as critical to better relations with China and has urged Obama to prioritise the negotiation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Marco Rubio: Republican Senator, Florida

Since being elected to the Senate in 2010, Senator Marco Rubio has tried to position himself as a foreign policy expert. Rubio believes, along with nearly all GOP candidates, that the world has become more dangerous during Obama’s tenure because the President has failed to build or display military strength adequately. Rubio opposes the current nuclear deal with Iran and would press for a better deal by pressuring Iran through a regional military build-up.⁵² He believes the US military is vital to securing the liberal global economic order, and sees Russia’s actions in Ukraine as a threat to that order, requiring the United States to provide assistance to Ukraine. He has accused Obama of “continuing to appease China’s leaders despite their mounting aggression,” and he believes that Washington must restore its “moral clarity” by taking a harder line towards Beijing on human rights.⁵³ Rubio concludes that China’s aggression towards its own citizens will turn into aggression against other nations if the United States does not act. This must be countered through closer American ties with Asian democracies.

Rubio believes that America’s primary strategic role in Asia should be to build and lead larger regional alliances

Rubio’s ideas require a great commitment of material resources to the US military and an aggressive stance towards other major powers. Rubio’s promise is that increased displays of strength and resolve will actually avert the need for war: a popular belief among many Republicans who see “peace through strength” as the model Ronald Reagan used for winning the Cold War. Although Rubio opposed granting Obama a congressional mandate to launch air strikes on Syria in 2013,

he has defended his decision on the grounds that Obama's proposed "pinprick attacks" were too limited in scope and that the US military "should only be engaged in an endeavour to win."⁵⁴ Rubio sees that Russia, China, and Iran all pose threats beyond domination of their regions, an assessment contested by many foreign policy experts. He sees them as inherently untrustworthy in international negotiations and essentially proposes intimidation as an alternative to diplomatic bargaining. Rubio regards "defending freedom" and spreading "liberal democratic principles" as a strategic imperative and is thus likely to be the preferred candidate of American neo-conservatives.⁵⁵

Along with the need for a more strident military posture, alliances are an important component of Rubio's foreign policy thinking. Rubio judges that "American leadership is critical in creating the alliances to confront challenges."⁵⁶ While he generally focuses on the Middle East, he has paid significant attention to Asia and believes that America's primary strategic role in Asia should be to build and lead larger regional alliances. He sees the Trans-Pacific Partnership as a way for Washington to construct a rules-based trading order between like-minded countries that will advance America's strategic interests by strengthening free-market forces as well as the domestic economy. In security terms, he argues for a "stronger" and "increased military alliance" in which the United States works with Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and others to "improve the capacity of these nations to defend themselves," thus changing China's military calculus in any territorial crisis. Rubio is a steadfast supporter of the US–Japan alliance, which he says is "key to a 21st-century Asia free and at peace."⁵⁷ He applauds Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's legislative reforms to allow Japanese forces to take part in collective self-defence and he advocates closer US–Japan defence cooperation to address both North Korea's nuclear threats and Chinese aggression in the South China Sea.⁵⁸ In order to "neutralize China's rapidly growing capabilities," Rubio thinks it is necessary to restore the Pentagon's pre-sequestration budget and reinforce ties with US allies in the Pacific, including through joint freedom of navigation naval exercises.⁵⁹ Yet, cognisant of the need to preserve US power and avoid free-riding allies, he has also called for greater

collaboration among regional partners, arguing, "America cannot and need not bear the full burden of counterbalancing China's power."⁶⁰

Bernie Sanders: Democrat Senator, Vermont

Senator Bernie Sanders, who is currently Clinton's strongest opponent in the Democratic primary, has almost completely avoided discussions on foreign policy. He identifies himself as a socialist rather than a Democrat in Congress and deliberately campaigns almost exclusively on economic issues. As a senator, Sanders's long voting record has included opposing both the 1991 and 2003 Iraq Wars, but supporting the 2001 Afghanistan War and 1999 NATO-led intervention in Kosovo. In one of his only campaign comments on foreign policy, he broadly suggested the need for "Muslim countries" across the Middle East to play a leading role in a more multilateral approach to addressing problems such as ISIS — noting that the United States, United Kingdom, and France should simply be "supportive."⁶¹ While he believes the United States should "create a unified stance with ... international allies in order to effectively address Russian aggression," he wants Washington to reduce its military spending and overseas troop deployments.⁶² Sanders has no specific position on US alliances in the Asia–Pacific, though he argues, vaguely, that America "must work with the international community to deter foreign support for China's military build up."⁶³ He condemns America's growing trade deficit with China, but opposes the Trans-Pacific Partnership for outsourcing American jobs.

While Sanders believes the United States should "create a unified stance with ... international allies in order to effectively address Russian aggression," he wants Washington to reduce its military spending and overseas troop deployments

Donald Trump: Republican Businessman and Entertainer, New York

Donald Trump has shown little interest thus far in crafting a developed foreign policy stance and appears unlikely to do so. However, his approach to immigration has important foreign policy dimensions and reflects a generally belligerent posture towards the rest of the world. Trump insists that foreign countries are taking advantage of America: Mexico through illegal immigration, China through economic subterfuge, Iran through the nuclear deal, and Saudi Arabia through receipt of US military aid. He believes that the strong and “clever” leaders of these countries are getting the better of America’s politicians who are, by his estimation, weak and stupid. In response to the national humiliation of being outmanoeuvred by these countries, Trump proposes punitive measures against them and demands that they, not the United States, should foot the bill. For instance, Mexico would pay for a wall to keep Mexicans out of America, while Saudi Arabia would pay for US troops in the Middle East to fight ISIS. Trump’s approach is premised on the implausible idea that other countries would succumb to his power as a negotiator and, therefore, that he would “get along with a lot of the world leaders that [the United States] is not getting along with [today].”⁶⁴ When asked what he would do about the various leaders of America’s enemies, he simply — and somewhat inconsistently — responds that such leaders would not be around for very long in his administration. Although this may seem absurd, it simply represents an exaggerated version of the rhetoric of many Republican candidates. Where Trump seriously departs from Republican orthodoxy is in his suggestion that the United States should engage in a trade war with its largest economic partner, China. Trump argues of China “they’ve taken our money and our jobs, our manufacturing, they’ve taken everything ... It’s one of the greatest thefts in the history of the world.”⁶⁵ His views on trade and the international economy are paradoxical, claiming to believe in free trade yet arguing for major tariff increases to protect US manufacturing. A majority of foreign policy experts on both sides of politics fervently hope that it is impossible for Donald Trump to win the presidency.

While it is hardly comprehensive, Trump presents a neo-isolationist perspective on America’s alliances in the Asia–Pacific. He has called the Trans-Pacific Partnership a “bad deal” that is “an attack on America’s business.”⁶⁶ In line with his broader view that Washington is being tricked into paying for other countries’ privileges, he is highly dismissive of free-riding allies and seemingly uninterested in the wider strategic benefits of resolute Asian security partnerships. Trump has taken aim at the US–Japan alliance by claiming that, “If Japan gets attacked, we have to immediately go to their aid,” whereas “if [the United States] gets attacked, Japan doesn’t have to help us” — implying that Washington’s pre-eminent Asian alliance is not a “fair deal.”⁶⁷ He has also attacked the US–South Korea alliance, asking Americans “How long will we go on defending South Korea from North Korea without payment?” and suggesting that Koreans “think we’re stupid [because] we’re doing it for nothing.”⁶⁸ Although such comments are pot-holed with factual inaccuracies — for instance, Abe’s new defence guidelines will permit Japan to defend American forces, and Seoul contributed US\$861 million towards the US military presence on the Korean Peninsula last year — they reflect a deeply libertarian, albeit marginal, tradition in US foreign policy thinking.⁶⁹ Were it to be implemented, Trump’s confrontational stance towards America’s Asian allies would risk fracturing the security partnerships that have underscored regional stability for the past seven decades.

			CANDIDATE'S VIEWS			
CANDIDATE	KEY FOCUS	APPROACH	MILITARY	ASIAN ALLIANCES	CHINA	ISLAMIC STATE
JEB BUSH	Defeating "radical Islam"	Neo-conservative	Need to rebuild military, increase defence spending; US military should equal any threat	Need to strengthen alliances with Japan, Australia, South Korea, and other like-minded partners	Need to address China's rising ambition; impose "super sanctions" for cyber espionage	Strengthen ties with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and rebels; intensify air strikes, but avoid deploying US troops
TED CRUZ	Revitalising US alliances in the Middle East and Europe	Mix of neo-conservative and isolationist	Supports increased defence spending; generally opposes sequestration	Asia is not a major focus; seeks strong network of allies, but wants them to commit resources	Believes China only recognises strength; notes Asian allies are trying to resist its territorial expansion	United States should "bomb them back to the Stone Age" rather than use limited force
CARLY FIORINA	Rebuilding US strength and confronting adversaries	Hawkish realist	Calls for a massive investment of funds to rebuild the military, including more naval power	No specific position on Asian alliances; generally wants more efforts to support and equip allies	Calls for a hardline approach towards China's cyber-theft, human rights abuses and South China Sea actions	Supports a US-led coalition to defeat ISIS and increased supply of arms to Middle East states, but not more US ground troops at this stage
JOHN KASICH	Strengthening US military and global alliances	Traditional Republican realist	Need to bolster military, especially power projection capabilities, but not through large budget increases	No discussion of Asian alliances; generally sees allies as critical to US security, but thinks they need to pull their own weight	Both a partner and adversary; United States must boost presence in the Western Pacific and South China Sea	Would send US ground troops; supports increased military action by US and coalition forces
RAND PAUL	Recognising US limits and preserving its military might	Hawkish libertarian	Advocates a 16 per cent increase in defence spending; shed his past focus on budget cuts	Current stance unclear; previously supported reducing US troop presence in Japan and South Korea	China "sometimes an adversary" but also a partner; key to better relations is improved trade ties	Supports air strikes but warns against greater US action; favours Arab boots on the ground
MARCO RUBIO	Stronger action in the Middle East	Neo-conservative	Need to commit greater material resources and return to a pre-sequestration budget	Supports a strong US–Japan alliance and will reinforce other allies, but wants greater contribution from allies	Need to neutralise China's growing military capabilities and counter-balance its aggression	Need to lift restrictions on US forces supporting Iraqi troops and increase military efforts
DONALD TRUMP	Preventing other countries from exploiting the United States	Isolationist	Need to build a military so big and strong that "nobody's going to mess with us"	Dismissive of US support for free-riding allies, like Japan and South Korea	Believes that China is outsmarting US leaders; advocates a trade war with China	Would "put a ring around" ISIS, cut off oil revenue; deploy troops, but make Saudi Arabia pay
HILLARY CLINTON	Strengthening US alliances and partnerships	Pragmatic and hawkish realist	Need to maintain world's strongest military and invest in technological edge; wants an inquiry on defence spending	Advocates building a web of Asia–Pacific security partnerships; supports increased assistance to allies	United States must hold China accountable for its aggressive actions but encourage it to be a responsible stakeholder	Supports stronger US and coalition military action to defeat ISIS, but would avoid a ground war involving US troops
BERNIE SANDERS	Encouraging US partners to play the leading role	Isolationist	Opposes increased defence spending	No position on Asian alliances	Criticises US trade deficit with China; United States should work with others to deter support for China's military expansion	Middle Eastern states should assume leading role against threats like ISIS; United States and allies should only provide support

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