

Great Decisions Topics for 2018

February 11: Organizational Meeting

February 25: The Waning of Pax Americana

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

Study Guide: "The Waning of Pax Americana," by Carla Norrlof

March 4: China: Economic Power and Geopolitics

Over recent years, China has implemented an expansive strategy of economic diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. While the United States is taking a step back from multilateral trade agreements, 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?

Study Guide: "China and America: The New Geopolitical Equation," by David M. Lampton

March 11: Turkey: A Partner in Crisis

Of all NATO allies, Turkey represents the most daunting challenge for U.S. policy makers. In the wake of a failed military coup in July 2016, the autocratic trend in Ankara has taken a turn for the worse. Even more important than Turkey's geostrategic position as an ally is what it represents as the most institutionally westernized Muslim country in the world.

Study Guide: "Turkey: A Partner in Crisis," by Ömer Taspınar

March 18: U.S. Global Engagement & the Military

The United States is at a turning point when it comes to global engagement. 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 should be the role of the U.S. military force in the shifting international system?

Study Guide: "U.S. Global Engagement and the Military," by Gordon Adams

March 25: Global Health Issues

Global health has been an indisputable success story over the past 30 years. Actions by countries and organizations have 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.

Study Guide: "Global Health: Progress and Challenges," by Joshua Michaud

April 1: Easter Sunday, No Meeting

April 8: Russia's Foreign Policy

Under President Vladimir Putin, Russia is projecting an autocratic model of governance and working to destabilize liberal democracies. Putin's foreign policy toolkit also includes alliances with autocrats and proxy wars with the U.S. in Georgia, Ukraine and Syria. How does Putin conceive of Russian national interests, and why do Russian citizens support him? How should the United States respond?

Study Guide: "Russia's Foreign Policy," by Allen Lynch

April 15: 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. Cyberwarfare, hacking and misinformation pose complex security threats. What are the implications for U.S. policy?

Study Guide: "Media and Foreign Policy," by Susan Moeller

April 22: South Africa's Fragile Democracy

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. Could a weaker ANC lead to political fragmentation and a disturbing shift for this relatively new democracy?

Study Guide: "South Africa's Fragile Democracy," by Sean Jacobs

Note: specific titles and sequence are tentative and subject to change.