Our moments of greatest strength came when politics ended at the water’s edge. ... I will seek a foreign policy that all Americans, whatever their party, can support.

—Republican Presidential Candidate Donald J. Trump, April 27, 2016

It has been said that foreign policy is really domestic policy with its hat on. In a sense, this is true.

—Democratic Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, June 29, 1966

In this quotation from the 2016 campaign, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump embraced the common rhetoric of the separate realms of domestic and foreign policy and the desire for a bipartisan foreign policy. While partisan difference can reign in the domestic arena, so it goes, there is only one “American” view regarding foreign policy. It harkens to the time in 1966 when scholar Aaron Wildavsky (1966)
argued for the “two-presidencies” thesis that provided an analytical explanation for partisan division at home and bipartisan unity abroad. Yet, somewhat counter to the common assertion that “politics stops at the water’s edge,” Democratic Vice President Hubert Humphrey’s observation implies that the processes of foreign policy mirror that of domestic policy. Humphrey’s *Mad Men* era metaphor imagines an individual at home (the domestic policy) who puts “on a hat” to go outside (the foreign policy) to adopt a more formal personal presentation. While the policy’s presentation might be “dressed up,” with a hat on, there is no real distinction between the individual at home and outside or the politics of domestic and foreign policy. Or, put a little more bluntly, as Trump White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney said on October 17, 2019, “And I have news for everybody. Get over it. There’s going to be political influence in foreign policy.”

In considering recent trends in public opinion on foreign policy, this chapter suggests that the reality of current foreign policy reflects a blend of the views expressed in the Trump and Humphrey quotations. At the general level and particularly on the foreign policy issues the public cares the most about, broad agreement across parties exists. As the questions about policies become more specific and more closely associated with the Trump Doctrine, greater partisan divisions emerge suggesting a blurring of the lines between domestic and foreign policy. Although a deep examination of why this is the case is beyond the scope of this chapter, suffice it to say that all the factors central to the opinion and foreign policy process, such as information acquisition, attitude formation, media effects, presidential leadership, and elite cuing now mirror the processes observed at the domestic level (Foyle 2017). As observed in the public’s reaction to Trump’s foreign policies as president, the public has largely responded to his policies as they have to his domestic policies. That is, the public views his policies through a decidedly partisan lens such that the partisan divisions regarding Trump and his policies over domestic issues now largely occur over the foreign policies the Trump Doctrine emphasizes. In many senses, the Trump Doctrine has completed the blurring of the lines between domestic and foreign policy attitudes such that foreign policy might no longer even have “its hat on” as Vice-President Humphrey suggested a half a century ago.
Partisan Division and Foreign Policy Consensus

Much has rightly been made in recent discussions about potential “partisan gaps” in foreign policy attitudes where Republicans and Democrats in polls express support or opposition to issues at varying levels (Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2015). This chapter distinguishes between smaller gaps between the parties where majorities might even agree with each other and larger gaps where majorities disagree with each other. In this chapter, “partisan gaps” will refer to differences in attitudes between Republicans and Democrats on policy issues (e.g., 65% of Republicans favoring a policy and 73% of Democrats favoring the same policy results in a partisan gap of 7%). Although partisan gaps can be measured statistically (Holsti 2004), this paper will rely on describing opinion differences which is common in more policy-focused research (Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2015). “Partisan division” will refer to a particular type of partisan gap where majorities of the two parties oppose each other (e.g., 28% Republican support and 73% Democratic support). While partisan gaps have long been a source of interest for scholars (Foyle 2017; Holsti 2004) and observers of public opinion on foreign policy (Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2015), examining the extent of partisan division will help us consider the implications of these attitudes for foreign policy. A 5 point difference between the parties where 75% of one party and 70% of the other favor an issue is less politically important from a partisan perspective than situations where majorities oppose each other. Of course, not all partisan divisions are created alike with a 75–25 division (and large partisan gap) likely more substantively important than a 52–48 division (and small partisan gap). Although this chapter discusses both partisan gaps and partisan divisions, the main focus is on partisan division and especially those with larger partisan gaps.

Public opinion’s increasingly partisan divide over some foreign policy issues reflects a long-term shift in attitudes (Pew 2017). Though partisanship and ideology as a basis of foreign policy attitudes are well-established (Holsti 2004), the extent and depth of current partisan gaps are new. In the past, partisan gaps on foreign policy, though measurable and potentially quite large, less often rose to the level of partisan division on highly salient foreign policy issues. While this shift had begun before Trump became president, President Trump’s focus in words or actions on particular foreign policy issues, such as immigration and climate change,
exacerbated and accelerated underlying trends. In this sense, Trump’s presidency amplifies a shift already underway rather than instigating it.

**The Trump Doctrine and Partisan Gaps in Foreign Policy**

This chapter examines the public’s reaction to Trump’s foreign policies. We consider them in the context of previous public attitudes on threats to the United States, goals and priorities for foreign policy, foreign policy means, and specific substantive foreign policies. This evaluation focuses on the public’s reactions to core aspects of the Trump Doctrine with attention to partisan similarities and differences. This analysis points to the varying effect of the Trump Doctrine with some public attitudes unchanged, some new differences created in opinion, and old partisan differences exacerbated.

A core finding of this analysis is that areas of agreement between partisans are roughly shaped like an “upside-down pyramid” with more agreement on general perspectives (e.g., role of the United States in the world, importance of trade) and increasingly more division as the issues become more specific (e.g., approach toward China, tariffs). At the broadest level, a bipartisan consensus agrees that the United States should remain engaged in the world. More mid-range views about foreign policy goals, priorities, and threats reflect a similar partisan agreement on the main problems facing the United States (terrorism, spread of nuclear weapons, danger from cyber-attacks). However, on issues that the public prioritizes less (e.g., immigration, climate change), strongly partisan differences emerge. Since these lower priority issues are both prone to partisan division and the core areas of focus for the Trump Doctrine, current foreign policy debates give an outsized impression of partisan division on foreign policy and obscures areas of core bipartisan consensus.

Attitudes about the Trump Doctrine’s policy components display a similar pattern. A central approach of the Trump Doctrine is the willingness and ability to go it alone in foreign policy. At the general level, a bipartisan consensus breaks with the Trump Doctrine on its more unilateralist underpinnings and regarding allies with both Republicans and Democrats supporting alliances and alliance partners. More narrowly, partisan divisions emerge over international organizations with Republicans dubious and Democrats more favorable. Moving more specifically, with some exceptions, the public largely divides along party
lines regarding the substance of issues the Trump Doctrine has emphasized (e.g., immigration). When policies toward specific issues (Iran, Russia, China, trade, immigration) are considered, moderate agreement on broader issues gives way to more differences on policy specifics (e.g., “getting tough” or not on a particular issue). And of course it depends on what those words mean and how they are understood. As discussed later in the chapter, little public consensus supporting the Trump Doctrine exists regarding how the policies on these issues should be pursued with the public either disagreeing with the broad Trump Doctrine approach (alliances) or splitting along partisan lines over policies to achieve American goals (tariffs to achieve trade goals).

Stepping back to think about what these attitudes portend for American foreign policy, the strong and prominent disagreements that exist over some substantive issues and means raised by the Trump Doctrine mask a bipartisan consensus on many core priorities, and approaches. These findings suggest that there is no necessary reason that the foreign policy consensus has permanently fractured. The attention by the political system on the disagreements gives the impression of more division than actually might exist if the leaders, in particular the president, emphasized issues around which agreement currently exists rather than highlighting those issues on which strong partisan disagreement reigns. At least some reporting suggests that political and electoral calculations provide a partial explanation for why the president focuses on issues of partisan division (Toosi 2019). It pays politically to highlight those issues where the public, especially one’s partisans, agree with you and disagree with your opponent. The political incentives would seem to spur politicians to continue to emphasize points of disagreement. Because foreign policy now operates like domestic politics where politicians emphasize issues that favor their political positions, it is unlikely that the perception of partisan division will change. Since politics has made partisan political bases more important, party leaders tend to emphasize those issues that motivate their partisans. We will likely see more division in future because of this political incentive even though there is fundamental agreement on the basics. While the political interests of political figures will likely be served by this approach, the foreign policy issues that the public considers the most important and around which partisan consensus exists will continue to receive relatively less attention. It also begs the question of whether United States foreign policy is being served by this process.
THE ROLE OF UNITED STATES

At a very general level, there appears to be some continued and longstanding agreement on whether or not the United States should take an active role in world affairs. The Chicago Council on Global Affairs has posed a repeated question asking whether the United States should “take an active part in world affairs” or “stay out” since 1974. Since that time, with small variations, roughly two-thirds have favored an active part and one-third favored staying out. Notable exceptions occurred in 1982 and 2014, when the United States was in the depths of an economic recession. In 2019, 69% of the public favored an active part, with little variation among Democrats (75%), Republicans (69%), and Independents (64%). While some differences exist on the type of role the United States should play (dominant leader, shared role, or no leadership role), these partisan gaps do not rise to partisan division with Democrats (75%), Republicans (51%), and Independents (69%) all favoring shared leadership (Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2019). These attitudes changed very little since the question was first asked before the Trump presidency in 2015 (Democrats 72%, Republicans 57%, independents 63%, and overall 66% favoring shared leadership). None of these results suggests a significant shift in attitudes since Trump’s election.

In a question directed more closely at a potential inward looking inclination that is present in the Trump administration rhetoric, a slightly different wording of a similar poll hints at some small changes at the margins. A 2017 Pew poll asked whether “It’s best for the future of our country to be active in world affairs” or “we should pay less attention to problems overseas.” Before Trump’s election in 2014, both Democrats (58%) and Republicans (60%) thought it was best to pay less attention to foreign affairs and roughly 1/3 favored being active in world affairs (38% of Democrats and 36% of Republicans). With the election of Trump, 2017 Republican attitudes remained consistent (54% favoring less attention and 39% supporting an active role). Conversely, Democratic attitudes flipped, with a majority favoring an active role (56%) and a minority (39%) supporting paying less attention to foreign affairs (Pew Research Center 2017). This implies that while the Trump foreign policy did not affect Republican attitudes, the Trump administration’s inclination for withdrawal spurred a reactive response in Democrats so much so that a partisan division emerged between Republicans (54% less attention) and Democrats (56% active role). Perhaps closer to Trump’s “put America
"first" approach was a question asking whether the United States should “follow its own national interests” or “take into account the interests of its allies.” A modest change occurred after Trump’s election, with Democrats shifting toward considering allied interests (62% in 2016 to 74% in 2017) while Republicans shifted in favor of focusing on the national interest (from 43 to 54%) creating partisan division. This shift would seem to suggest that Republicans are inclining toward the Trump approach to “put America first” while Democrats are moving away (59% of the overall public favored considering allies while 36% supported the America first view) (Pew Research Center 2017).

The simple explanation of these attitudes is perhaps that the “pay less attention to allied interests” approach has become more closely associated with Trump in the period since the question was first asked in 2014. Before Trump’s emergence in 2015, a significant withdrawal sentiment in the Democratic Party was voiced by Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders. As Trump emphasized “putting America first,” a significant proportion of the Democrats likely shifted away from this policy stance. This shift in Democratic attitudes hints at other growing partisan divisions on more specific foreign policy inclinations. The end result is that foreign policy attitudes shifted, with Republicans aligning themselves with a core component of the Trump Doctrine and Democrats inclined otherwise. At the same time, these shifts occurred in a context in which the public preferred that the president focus on domestic policy rather than foreign policy with little partisan variation. With the overall sample in 2019 believing it is “more important for President Trump to focus on” domestic policy at 69%, Republicans (74%) and Democrats (66%) agreed. Dating back to the Bill Clinton administration in 1993, this poll indicated a domestic policy focus favored by a public majority (often by two-thirds or more) with only one exception (at the height of the Iraq War in January 2007) (Pew Research Center 2019). Contextually then, while this chapter focuses on foreign policy attitudes, domestic issues consistently remain the public’s most salient concerns, especially the state of the economy.

**FOREIGN POLICY GOALS AND PRIORITIES**

When questions move from broad inclinations on foreign policy to more specific goals, clear partisan divisions emerge that closely align with partisan responses to the Trump Doctrine. Across a number of items, Republicans favor policies associated with Trump’s policies while
Democrats fall in opposition. A late-2018 Pew Survey (Pew Research Center 2018) polled the public on 23 questions regarding whether an issue should be a “top priority,” “some priority,” or “no priority” when “thinking about long-range foreign policy goals.” Partisan division existed on about half (10 of 23) of these questions (see Table 7.1). Compared to the previous time the question was asked by Pew (Pew Research Center 2013), only 3 of 13 issues exhibited partisan division (Democrats favored “strengthening the United Nations” 50%/25%, “dealing with global climate change” 57%/16% compared to Republicans while Republicans favored “reducing illegal immigration” 62%/38%). On the other 10 issues, partisan gaps were small.

Two things are notable from the 2013 to 2018 comparison. First, gaps that existed in 2013 continued largely unchanged into 2018. The 2018 public remained as divided on climate change, illegal immigration, and strengthening the UN as before (as this chapter defines it, given a small decline in the Democratic support for the strengthening of the United Nations, the difference no longer exhibited partisan division). Given the

| % top priority                                                                 | Republican | Democrat | Total |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|----------|-------|
| **Majority support**                                                          |            |          |       |
| Taking measures to protect the United States from terrorism                    | 84         | 61       | 72    |
| Protecting jobs of American workers                                           | 81         | 65       | 71    |
| Preventing spread of WMD                                                      | 64         | 68       | 66    |
| **Partisan division, Democrats support**                                       |            |          |       |
| Improving relationships with allies                                           | 44         | 70       | 58    |
| Dealing with global climate change                                            | 22         | 64       | 46    |
| Reducing spread of infectious diseases                                        | 44         | 56       | 51    |
| Limiting power and influence of Russia                                        | 32         | 52       | 42    |
| **Partisan division, Republicans support**                                    |            |          |       |
| Maintaining US military advantage over all other countries                    | 70         | 34       | 49    |
| Reducing illegal immigration into the United States                           | 68         | 20       | 42    |
| Getting other countries to assume more of the costs of maintaining world order| 56         | 26       | 40    |
| Reducing our trade deficit with foreign countries                             | 54         | 33       | 42    |
| Limiting power and influence of Iran                                          | 52         | 29       | 39    |
| Promoting US business interests abroad                                        | 51         | 40       | 45    |

Source: Pew Research Center (2018)
priority placed on the issues of illegal immigration (by Republicans) and climate change (by Democrats), the stability of these differences is not surprising.

Second, a moderate degree of partisan consensus exists regarding support for “protecting the United States from terrorism,” “protecting the jobs of American workers,” and “preventing the spread of WMD.” Interestingly, these are the three most supported priorities. Items not supported by either party are items that traditionally receive sparse support and might fall into the category of political and economic development such as promoting human rights, improving living standards elsewhere, and promoting democracy. Others, might fall within the category of a general “pulling back” of the American public and letting others take care of themselves such as limiting North Korea’s power, strengthening the United Nations, preventing genocide, limiting China’s influence, aiding refugees, and solving the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Taken together, lower support for these priorities could be seen as some underlying support for the inward realignment of United States foreign policies toward domestic factors.

That said, perhaps most important is the third factor, which is that the breadth of issues that divide the two parties has grown in a manner that aligns with the components of the Trump Doctrine with Republican support and Democrat opposition or vice versa. The strongest divisions over priorities emerge from issues that either divided the public previously that Trump has emphasized (climate change, illegal immigration) or seem to be a reaction in favor of or opposition to Trump’s foreign policies (improving relationships with allies, maintaining US military advantage, reducing the trade deficit, limiting Russian influence, greater burden sharing, and limiting Iranian influence). Simply put, the public has responded to the Trump Doctrine based on its partisan perspectives.

A similar pattern is notable in looking at foreign policy goals (see Table 7.2 Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2018). Although question items varied from 2015 (Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2015) which prevents a direct item by item comparison, the existing questions align with the Pew poll results. The long-standing questions ask respondents to indicate whether the foreign policy goal is very important, somewhat important, or not an important goal at all. Comparisons are normally made among those responding that the item is a very important goal. In 2015, partisan division existed on six of the 14 issues polled. Two of these
Table 7.2  Foreign policy goals: partisan division

| % very important goal                           | Republicans | Democrats | Independents | Overall |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|--------------|---------|
| **Majority support**                           |             |           |              |         |
| Preventing the spread of nuclear weapons       | 74          | 76        | 66           | 72      |
| Protecting the jobs of American workers        | 79          | 65        | 67           | 69      |
| Improving America’s standing in the world     | 53          | 68        | 55           | 60      |
| **Partisan division, Democrats favor**         |             |           |              |         |
| Improving America’s reputation with the world  | 39          | 73        | 54           | 58      |
| Strengthening the United Nations               | 29          | 61        | 34           | 43      |
| Promoting international trade                  | 37          | 56        | 43           | 46      |
| Defending our allies’ security                 | 38          | 53        | 36           | 43      |
| **Partisan division, Republicans favor**       |             |           |              |         |
| Controlling and reducing illegal immigration   | 71          | 20        | 43           | 42      |
| Maintaining superior military power worldwide | 70          | 41        | 47           | 51      |
| Reducing our trade deficit with foreign countries | 53      | 34        | 42           | 42      |
| **Minority support**                           |             |           |              |         |
| Protecting weaker nations against foreign aggression | 24        | 42        | 25           | 31      |

Source Chicago Council on Global Affairs (2018)

questions (regarding superior military power and controlling illegal immigration) were repeated in 2018 with continued division. Four questions on goals in which gaps existed were not repeated in 2018 (a majority of Democrats favored combatting world hunger, improving access to clean water in other parts of the world, limiting climate change, and safeguarding against global financial instability).

In the 2018 survey, partisan division existed on seven of the 14 issues polled. Republicans favored goals of “controlling and reducing illegal immigration,” “maintaining superior military power worldwide,” and “reducing our trade deficit with foreign countries.” Each of these items directly engaged core components of the Trump Doctrine. Democrats favored issues directly responsive to the Trump Doctrine where they supported “improving America’s reputation in the world,”
“strengthening the United Nations,” “promoting international trade,” and “defending our allies’ security.

On goals directly related to the Trump Doctrine, polarization is apparent. On the two repeated questions, partisan division seems to have gotten marginally stronger. Between 2015 and 2018, the goal of maintaining superior military power received 1% greater support from Republicans and 7% less Democratic support, while Democratic support for reducing illegal immigration dropped 16% and Republican support increased 5%.

The pattern that emerges in the goals and priorities is that the partisan foundations for the Trump Doctrine existed prior to Trump’s emergence as a candidate in public opinion on several core issues that are part of “Making American Great Again,” including favoring increased American military power, focusing more on the United States, limiting the influence of international organizations, and preventing illegal immigration. These Trump Doctrine components represent goals supported by Republican segments of the population. For their part, Democrats have aligned against these goals and added others in reaction to the Trump Doctrine (improving America’s reputation, protecting American allies, limiting Russian influence). Beyond these differences, there is a core of agreement across parties against terrorism, for limiting the spread of nuclear weapons and in favor of protecting American jobs. It should be noted that these areas of consensus are in the top handful of foreign policy goals supported dating back a number of years. In total, Americans agree on the core goals and priorities for American foreign policy. Serious partisan differences on secondary foreign policy priorities exist that happen to be directly associated with the Trump Doctrine.

**On Threats**

A similar pattern exists regarding foreign policy threats. The Pew Organization asked about whether “possible international concerns for the United States” are a major, minor, or not a threat “to the well-being of the United States” in 2015 and 2019 (Pew Research Center 2015, 2019). This allows a comparison between the times before Trump became president and polls after he became president (see Table 7.3). Overall, partisan division emerged on 3 of the 7 questions asked in each of the polls and the effect of the Trump Doctrine is apparent in the responses. As with goals, climate change as a threat continued to divide the parties, with
Table 7.3  Foreign policy threats: partisan division

| % major threat | Republican 2019 | Democrat 2019 | Total 2019 | Republican 2015 | Democrat 2015 | Total 2015 |
|----------------|-----------------|---------------|------------|-----------------|---------------|------------|
| Partisan division 2019 | | | | | | |
| Global climate change | 27 | 84 | 57 | 22 | 73 | 49 |
| The Islamic militant group, known as ISIS | 59 | 48 | 53 | | | |
| The Islamic militant group in Iraq and Syria, known as ISIS | 93 | 79 | 83 | | | |
| Russia’s power and influence | 35 | 65 | 50 | | | |
| Growing authoritarianism in Russia | 50 | 40 | 42 | | | |
| Majority support 2019 | | | | | | |
| Cyber-attacks from other countries | 72 | 76 | 74 | | | |
| Iran’s nuclear program | 65 | 50 | 57 | | | |
| China’s power and influence | 58 | 52 | 54 | | | |
| China’s emergence as a world power | 62 | 44 | 49 | | | |
| North Korea’s Nuclear Program | 52 | 54 | 53 | | | |

Source: Pew Research Center (2015, 2019)

partisan division widening (a 51 point difference in 2015 became a 57 point difference in 2019). The shift in attitudes about Russia was the most notable change between the two polls and seems to reflect partisan reactions to the Trump Doctrine. While Republicans marginally saw Russia as a slightly greater threat than Democrats in 2015, attitudes had flipped and widened in the 2019 poll. Although question wording differences make a strict trend reading problematic (though see the same dynamic in the Chicago Council poll discussed next), two-thirds of Democrats saw “Russian power and influence” as a major threat while only one-third of Republicans agreed. Those familiar with Cold War party positions where Republican partisans were generally thought of as more critical of Russian/Soviet intentions will likely find this result surprising. These attitudes would seem to derive from what is perceived to be Trump’s more friendly approach to Russia and Democratic concerns about Russian meddling in the 2016 election. Finally, small partisan gaps emerged over ISIS, where members of both parties exhibited a strong drop in concern from 2015, likely in response to ISIS battlefield losses. Partisan differences
in 2015 over China disappeared in 2019, with majorities of both parties expressing concern (with Democrats tilting toward the Trump position). At least part of the apparent movement in attitudes about China from 2015 to 2019 likely derives from changes in question wording (China as a “world power” versus “China’s power and influence”). (A different 2019 survey that asked a question similar to the 2015 question [see Table 7.4] found continued partisan division regarding China). Partisan differences existed over the threat from the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in 2015, but the question was not repeated in 2015. Partisan consensus continued across the two polls on nuclear threats from North Korea and Iran. Both parties expressed strong concern over cyber-attacks. In all, while some baseline agreements exist, the 2019 findings highlight the partisan reaction to Trump’s foreign policies especially in regard to how the two parties viewed the threat from Russia and possibly on China.

Turning to the 2015 and 2019 Chicago Council polls on threats, a more evolving pattern exists in 2019 with growing division more apparent

Table 7.4  Foreign policy threats: partisan division

| % critical threat                                      | Republican | Democrat | Total |
|--------------------------------------------------------|------------|----------|-------|
| **Majority support**                                   |            |          |       |
| Cyber-attacks on U.S. Computer Networks                 | 74         | 77       | 77    |
| International Terrorism                                | 76         | 67       | 69    |
| North Korea’s Nuclear Program                          | 67         | 62       | 61    |
| Iran’s nuclear program                                 | 70         | 52       | 57    |
| **Partisan division, Democrats support**               |            |          |       |
| Climate change                                         | 23         | 78       | 54    |
| Foreign interference in American elections             | 37         | 69       | 53    |
| Political polarization in the United States            | 43         | 51       | 49    |
| The possibility of a new global arms race              | 43         | 55       | 48    |
| The rise of authoritarianism around the world           | 30         | 52       | 42    |
| **Partisan division, Republicans support**             |            |          |       |
| Large number of immigrants and refugees coming into the United States | 78 | 19 | 43 |
| The development of China as a world power              | 54         | 36       | 42    |
| **Minority support**                                   |            |          |       |
| The military power of Russia                           | 44         | 50       | 43    |
| Political instability in the Middle East               | 45         | 38       | 38    |
| Economic inequality in the world                       | 14         | 42       | 29    |

Source  Chicago Council on Global Affairs (2019)
(Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2015, 2019). As will be noted, some of this likely has to do with poll questions chosen to assess potential divisions. A long-standing question from the Chicago Council survey asks respondents to assess “possible threats to the vital interest of the United States in the next 10 years” and indicate whether each is a critical threat, important but not critical, or not an important threat at all. The 2015 survey listed 19 potential threats and only 3 threats found partisan division (% critical threat Democrat/Republican): Islamic fundamentalism (48/66); large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the United States (29/63); and climate change (58/17). As with the Pew surveys, no partisan division existed on the top seven problems: violent extremists carrying out a major terrorist attack in the United States (70/80); international terrorism (68/75); cyber-attacks on US computer networks (71/68); rise of violent extremist groups in Iraq and Syria (61/67); the possibility of unfriendly countries becoming nuclear powers (56/67); Iran’s nuclear program (56/67); and North Korea’s nuclear program (53/58). All of these issues received majority support overall from the entire sample.

The 2019 survey reflected the same core agreement on the primary threats, a widening of preexisting divisions, and a broader range of division (likely in part to the types of questions asked) (see Table 7.4). As with previous surveys, a strong core of support existed on the most supported issues including the threat from cyber-attacks, international terrorism, North Korea’s nuclear program, and Iran’s nuclear program. All of these items received bipartisan and majoritarian support in 2015.

Beyond this core, partisan divisions emerge. Democrats strongly viewed climate change as a threat while Republicans opposed, with the partisan gap growing from 41 points in 2015 to 55 points in 2019. Democrats also identified several threats that likely draw directly from Trump’s foreign policies such as foreign interference in American elections, political polarization, a new global arms race, and the rise of authoritarianism in the world. Among these, most notable is the wide partisan gap between Democrats and Republicans of 32 points regarding foreign interference. As for Republicans, their top ranked threat was large numbers of immigrants entering the United States with a gap that had widened (59 points) since 2015 (34 points). A majority of Republicans also saw China as a threat. Given Trump’s emphasis on both of these issues, it is not a surprise to see Republican support and Democrat opposition.
To be sure, across all these issues there are important caveats to be noted. First, across many of these issues, there might be partisan gaps that this chapter underemphasizes given the focus on partisan divisions (for example, economic inequality in the world as a threat is seen as critical by 14% of Republicans and 42% of Democrats). The point of this review is not to probe all the nuances of partisan gaps, but to consider partisan divisions. Second, each of these polls is commonly reported (as here) comparing and contrasting the highest rating (e.g., percentage critical threat). Not viewing an issue as a critical threat does not mean that the individual sees the issue as “no threat.” That said, this approach is common because it reveals differing priorities between the parties. Further examination into specific policy means and the specific policies of the Trump Doctrine will point to areas of continued division but also surprising consensus on some potentially divisive issues.

Public opinion in the Trump era reflects an intriguing dichotomy. A bipartisan consensus exists on the main threats to the United States, which existed before Trump came into office and has continued since (international terrorism, the spread of nuclear weapons including programs in North Korea and Iran, cyber-attacks, protecting American jobs). As will be discussed in later sections, partisan divisions on these issues emerge not around these topics as goals or threats, but how the goals should be pursued and threats dealt with. The Trump Doctrine, by taking a particular approach to these issues, creates partisan divides over the policies to address these issues (Toosi 2019). This process more closely mirrors the partisan domestic politics at the same time slightly obscuring the underlying consensus. In addition, there is strong disagreement on several salient issues that also closely emerge from the Trump Doctrine including illegal immigration, military power, multilateralism, climate change, and Russia in American foreign policy.

**Foreign Policy Means**

The public’s response to the unilateralist aspects of the Trump Doctrine to achieve American goals and respond to threats emerges from a partisan framework where Democrats are more inclined to favor multilateralism and Republicans are more inclined to go it alone (Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2015). That said, both Republicans and Democrats appear to support alliances and the actions needed to sustain them. Republicans,
though, appear more skeptical than Democrats about multilateral institutions. The Trump Doctrine is a general unilateralist orientation that would seem to be pushing against underlying public inclinations to work with other nations. At the same time, on specific policies, as we’ve seen with other issues, Republicans seem more inclined to support the Trump administration’s more unilateralist policies.

In general, Democrats are more inclined to favor “improving relations with allies,” “improving America’s reputation with the world,” and “strengthening the United Nations” than Republicans (see Tables 7.2 and 7.3). The two questions on improving relations would appear to be selected in order to assess reactions to the Trump Doctrine that some might suggest had worsened both the US reputation and allied relations. The question on strengthening the United Nations reflects Republican skepticism of that multilateral institution. Further evidence comes from another question regarding working within the United Nations that puts the value of acting within the United Nations against the value of getting what the United States wants. Democrats overwhelming agreed (82% in favor) and Republicans opposed (40% in favor) that “when dealing with international problems, the United States should be more willing to make decisions within the United Nations even if this means that the United States will sometimes have to go along with a policy that is not its first choice.” This reaction does not seem to have changed much since Trump’s election, since 74% of Democrats and 45% of Republicans supported the view in 2014 (Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2015). A central aspect of the Trump Doctrine is to ask other countries to rely more on themselves and Republicans (see Table 7.1) support this burden sharing shift to a much greater degree than Democrats. This broad inclination of priorities seems to align with partisan assessments of the Trump Doctrine.

The 2019 Chicago Council survey (Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2019) asked a new question assessing how well different broad policies “make the United States more safe, less safe” or no difference. Three questions bear directly on multilateralism and the Trump administration. First, partisan agreement exists regarding the effectiveness of “U.S. alliances with other countries” with 77% of Democrats and 75% of Republicans believing that they made the United States more safe (74% overall). Second, “maintaining US military superiority” was supported by both Democrats (61%) and Republicans (87%) (69% overall). While a partisan gap exists on this issue, partisan division does not. Third, both parties
(50% Democrats, 61% Republicans, 51% overall) supported “stationing US troops in allied countries.” Finally, clear differences exist on the effectiveness of multilateral institutions with Democrats more supportive (66%) than Republicans (44%) that “participating in international organizations” made the United States more safe (54% overall). These questions represent four of the five approaches that the majority found beneficial for safety. The one other question receiving majority support (56% overall) was support for “promoting democracy and human rights around the world” (Democrats 66%, Republicans 49%).

Both parties favor alliances, building American power, and deploying American power to support those alliances. In addition, bipartisan consensus exists regarding the use of force to support American allies. Across a range of specific scenarios (North Korea attacking Japan, North Korea invading South Korea, “Russia invading a NATO ally like Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania”) and general scenarios (an unnamed ally invaded, a country seizing the territory of an American ally) majorities of both parties support the use of American forces (Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2018). Both parties seem to be united behind keeping and maintaining commitments to American allies.

This inclination was on display regarding a specific alliance (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization—NATO) and a specific international agreement (the Paris Climate Accords). Solid majorities supported NATO as central to American interests. In response to the question of whether NATO is “still essential to our country’s security” or “no longer essential,” 86% of Democrats and 62% of Republicans agreed (73% overall) while minorities saw NATO as no longer essential (10% of Democrats, 34% of Republicans, and 24% overall) (Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2019). Asked to put more resources into NATO, a bipartisan view emerged again. When asked whether the United States should “increase our commitment to NATO,” keep it “what it is now,” decrease, or withdrawal from the treaty, 60% of Democrats and 64% of Republicans favored keeping the commitment the same (61% overall). Secondly, a smaller percentage of Democrats (30%) favored increasing the commitment, while a smaller percentage of Republicans (19%) favored decreasing the commitment (Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2018). Partisan agreement appeared supporting the status quo with significant minorities tilting to increasing the commitment in the case of Democrats or less commitment for Republicans.
A question regarding the Paris Agreement on greenhouse gas emissions combined two aspects that Republicans find suspect in multilateral agreements and climate change. The question asked whether the United States should participate in “the Paris Agreement that calls for countries to collectively reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases.” As expected, 86% of Democrats supported involvement while 43% of Republicans agreed (68% overall) (Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2018).

Unlike the other areas of public opinion discussed in relation to the Trump Doctrine, American attitudes about the means of foreign policy seem not to have changed and do not strictly align with the Trump Doctrine perspective. Americans of both parties appear to support continued reliance on existing alliances and actions to support American allies. While Republicans favor greater financial support from allies to pursue these objectives, their attitudes toward the importance of traditional allies have not changed as a result of the Trump Doctrine. In addition, Republicans have long been and remain skeptical of international organizations as an effective means of pursuing American interests, while Democrats are more supportive. Again, this has not changed as a result of the Trump Doctrine. And, for the most part, the attitudes of both parties cut against the foundational view of the Trump Doctrine to pull back from overseas commitments. As for the question of “how” to best pursue American interests, a bipartisan consensus exists within American public opinion at odds with the Trump Doctrine in support of engagement with alliances. On international agreements, partisan division continued with Democrats opposing and Republicans supporting the Trump Doctrine’s suspicion of international agreements at least in relation to the Paris Climate Accords.

The Trump Doctrine and Specific Foreign Policies

In this final section, an examination of several specific foreign policy attitudes suggests that public divisions over the goals and threats in foreign policy extend to the specific policies to engage these issues. Considering policies specifically toward China, Russia, and Iran highlights how the Trump Doctrine’s application to these countries split public opinion in predictable partisan ways. An examination of two core issues of the Trump Doctrine, trade and immigration, reveals a similar pattern.

To begin with, a clear division exists between the parties on whether the United States is more or less “respected by other countries” compared
to the past. While 40% of Republicans in 2019 believe the United States is more respected than in the past (up from 11% before Trump took office in 2016) and 29% say it is less respected (down from 70% before Trump took office), Democrats have trended in the opposite direction with “more respected” dropping from 16 to 4% and “less respected” jumping from 58 to 82% from 2016 to 2019. Overall public attitudes remained fairly steady over the time, with “more respected” moving from 14% in 2016 to 20% in 2019 and “less respected” declining from 61% in 2016 to 57% in 2019. The movement then seems to be more partisan in nature with Republicans and Democrats switching positions as the Republicans saw the transition from Obama to Trump as increasing respect and the Democrats seeing respect declining (Pew Research Center 2019).

Turning to specific issues, somewhat mixed partisan differences appear regarding how to deal with problems. While 57% (65% of Republicans and 50% of Democrats) saw Iran’s nuclear program as a threat, wide divisions existed on how to deal with it. Republicans favored taking a “firm stand,” with 68% agreeing (25% wished to “avoid a military conflict with Iran”) while 71% of Democrats wanted to “avoid a military conflict with Iran” (23% favored a “firm stand”) (the overall public supported avoiding a military conflict compared to a firm stand by a 49–44% margin) (Pew Research Center 2019). Regarding the actual nuclear deal with Iran, while a partisan gap existed, majorities of both Republicans (52%) and Democrats (82%) favored participating in the deal. Still, opposition was more apparent among Republicans (43%) than Democrats (16%). While there is a somewhat large partisan gap, it does not rise to political division (Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2018). Also, when the question is posed more narrowly, these divisions disappear. There is strong partisan agreement in favor of the use of US troops “to stop Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons” with 62% of Democrats and 77% of Republicans (65% overall) favoring the action (the second highest hypothetical use of force response) (Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2018). These snapshots of attitudes about Iran that show significant partisan gaps, but not enormous partisan divisions, continue in other areas.

**The Trump Doctrine and Russia**

Perhaps the area that has seen some of the largest shift in attitudes is views about Russia. Most importantly, on the question of threats, a partisan
division has appeared between the parties. Before Trump became president, across a series of questions regarding Russia, significant partisan differences did not exist. In April 2016, 46% of Republicans and 37% of Democrats saw “tensions with Russia” as a major threat to the “well-being of the United States.” While these results show a partisan gap, Republicans viewed Russia more skeptically than Democrats. By 2019, for the first time in recent years, a wide partisan gap emerged with, surprisingly in historical terms since Republicans tended to be more negative of Russia than Democrats during the Cold War, two-thirds of Democrats viewed (65%) “Russia’s power and influence as a major threat to the well-being of the United States” while only 35% of Republicans agreed. This partisan division only emerged after Trump’s election. On a second question asking whether respondents viewed Russia as an adversary, serious problem or not a problem, differences were less dramatic. At the same time, the trend in attitudes mirrors the other poll, with Republicans leaning toward seeing less of a threat from Russia. In 2016, differences between partisans on this question were small on whether Russia was an adversary (27% of Republicans, 20% of Democrats), a serious problem (41% of Republicans, 47% of Democrats), or not a problem (29% of Republicans and Democrats alike). By 2019, small gaps on these questions had emerged, regarding Russia as an adversary (20% of Republicans, 34% of Democrats), a serious problem (41% of Republicans, 49% of Democrats), and not a problem (38% of Republicans, 14% of Democrats) (Pew Research Center 2019). The largest shift came with increasing concern by Democrats and somewhat declining concern by Republicans. In combination with the earlier discussions regarding Russia, these responses portray rising concern by Democrats and declining concern by Republicans. Like other issues, these responses would seem to track with the Trump administration policy which has downplayed concerns with Russia. At least part of this result could probably be explained by differing assessments of Russian interference in American elections with Democrats emphasizing it and the Trump administration downplaying it.

The Trump Doctrine and China

As with Iran and Russia, attitudes toward China have partisan valences and align with the Trump Doctrine approach of getting tougher on China. Partisan differences on the threat from China have grown during
the Trump presidency with a likely explanation the Trump administration’s policy of confrontation. Between 1990 and 2018, Republican and Democratic opinions largely tracked each other on China. More recently, in 2014, only small differences existed between the percentage of Republicans (46%) and Democrats (38%) seeing a critical threat from “the development of China as a world power” (38% overall). In 2017 and 2018, few differences emerged on the same questions with Republicans at 41 and 42% respectively, Democrats at 37 and 40% respectively, and 39% overall in both years. However, as the economic confrontation with China deepened, clear partisan divisions emerged in 2019 with 54% of Republicans seeing China as a critical threat while the percentage of Democrats actually declined to 36% (42% overall). This partisan shift is similar to what is seen in other areas reported in this chapter (Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2019).

These recent differences extend to policy preferences although Republicans have favored stronger actions than Democrats for some time. In 2011, 51% of Republicans and 32% of Democrats wanted to “get tougher” on China regarding economic issues (40% overall). In 2019, Republican attitudes stayed steady (54%) while Democratic attitudes declined (19%) likely in response to negative assessments of the Trump administration’s imposition of tariffs on China (35% overall) (Pew Research Center 2019). Smaller gaps existed on the adversary question discussed regarding Russia, with members of both parties seeing China as more of a threat with Republicans slightly more supportive. More Republicans saw China as an adversary (30% of Republicans, 16% of Democrats, 23% overall) while more Democrats saw China as a serious problem (47% of Republicans, 56% of Democrats, 50% overall). Roughly equal numbers saw China as not a problem (22% of Republicans, 24% of Democrats, 24% overall) (Pew Research Center 2019). As with Russia and Iran, as the Trump administration continues, partisan differences are emerging in reaction to policies that the administration is pursuing.

The Trump Doctrine and Trade

Turning to substantive issues rather than views on countries, attitudes on trade find Republicans and Democrats agreeing with each other against the Trump Doctrine in general terms, but dividing more on policy specifics. Attitudes about free trade partly tracked the partisan division trend but have snapped back to the historical baseline. In response to
the question of whether “free trade agreements between the United States and other countries have been a good thing for the United States,” 65% overall said “good thing” and 22% said “bad thing.” A majority of Democrats have consistently viewed free trade in positive terms, with support rising to a post-2009 peak (73% up from 53%) in 2019. Democrats viewing it as a “bad thing” declined from 34% in 2009 to 15% in 2019 (Pew Research Center 2019). On the eve of the 2016 election, 56% of Democrats viewed trade positively, compared to 34% who viewed it as a bad thing (Stokes 2016). The slight rise in favorable Democratic attitudes could derive from a counter-reaction to the Trump Doctrine’s view that the United States has been taken advantage of by free trade and support for tariffs.

On the Republican side, partisans viewed trade favorably in 2015, with 68% seeing it as good (Pew Research Center 2015). As Trump campaigned against traditional views of free trade, Republican support for trade as a “good thing” dropped precipitously to 38% and a majority viewed it as a “bad thing” (53%) (Stokes 2016). Entering the 2016 election and for a little over a year after, partisan differences on free trade saw majorities of Republicans viewing free trade as a bad thing and majorities of Democrats seeing it as a good thing, which reflects the common pattern discussed in this chapter regarding partisan splits on the main components of the Trump Doctrine. But, as the trade war with China deepened in 2018 and 2019, Republican attitudes returned to the pre-Trump baseline. By 2019, 59% of Republicans viewed free trade agreements as a “good thing” (29% bad thing) which restored the bipartisan public consensus on the issue (Pew Research Center 2019). The effects of Trump’s policy cuing might be reversed in the face of material economic disruptions such as those to agricultural exports (Hoagland 2019). This reversal in opinion potentially suggests both the power of partisan opinion leadership in driving Republican attitudes down and its limitations as Republican attitudes returned to baseline in the face of the negative consequences of the trade war.

Some evidence in support of this view lies in specific questions about the effect of trade and support for tariffs. Both Republicans and Democrats believe that international trade is good for both the US economy and American companies with Democrats somewhat more supportive than Republicans. In 2016, 68% of Democrats and 51% of Republicans (59% overall) thought “international trade” was good for the US economy. By 2019, support had gone up across all segments,
with 90% of Democrats and 88% of Republicans (88% overall) viewing it positively. Regarding American companies, the 2019 reading with 88% of Democrats and 82% of Republicans (85% overall) reflected a rise from 2016 when 65% of Democrats and 50% of Republicans (57% overall) supported the view.

The reaction to the Trump Doctrine’s approach seems to have increased support for international trade somewhat while continuing the trend of small partisan gaps, but not partisan divisions (Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2016, 2019). Digging deeper into policy, the expected partisan pattern emerges on tariff policy. In 2019, 67% of Republicans thought the “increased tariffs between the United States and its trading partners” have been “good for the United States” (26% bad) while only 12% of Democrats agreed (82% bad; overall 37% good and 56% bad) (Pew Research Center 2019). This pattern on trade comports with attitude shifts on other issues where attitudes changed based on partisan identity.

**The Trump Doctrine and Immigration**

An almost opposite pattern exists on immigration, where more partisan agreement (or at least lack of partisan division) exists on policy specifics even though differences exist on generalities. Historically, partisan agreement existed on whether a “large number of immigrants and refugees coming into the United States” constituted a “critical threat” from 1998 through 2002 with about 60% agreeing (Republicans at 58% in 2002, Democrats 62%, and 60% overall) (Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2019). Beginning in 2004, Republican attitudes held steady through 2018 (between 55% and 67% saying “critical threat”) before an upward shift in 2019 to 78%. This timing of opinion change would suggest that the Trump Doctrine emphasis on immigration is more of a response to preexisting attitudes (which might have shifted due to changes in immigration patterns) than a cause of attitudinal change. While Democratic attitudes have shifted since 2002, they appear largely unaffected by the Trump Doctrine. Beginning in 2004, a steadily declining percentage of Democrats viewed immigration as a critical threat, with 49% in 2004 dropping to 27% in 2016 and declining further to 19% in 2019. Democratic opinion responses to the Trump Doctrine on immigration appear to be small in large part because attitudes had already shifted before Trump’s emergence (Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2019).
At least part of this differing response to immigration appears to lie in perceptions that immigration presents a threat to American identity. A majority of Republicans (57%) endorsed the idea that “if America is too open to people from all over the world, we risk losing our identity as a nation” (11% of Democrats agreed; 33% overall). This compares with 37% of Republicans who endorsed the view that “America’s openness to people from all over the world is essential to who we are as a nation” (86% of Democrats and 62% overall). Compared to 2017 when the question was first asked, Republicans shifted from evenly divided (48% “losing identity” to 47% “essential to who we are”) to the majority seeing it as a threat, while Democratic attitudes remained largely unchanged (84% essential to 14% losing our identity) (Pew Research Center 2019).

More evidence of the effect of the Trump Doctrine seems to appear when examining attitudes about the underlying effectiveness of particular policies. Partisan divisions emerge concerning the policies that Trump has emphasized while bipartisan consensus exists on policies that have not been emphasized. When asked about the effectiveness of specific policies for “dealing with the issue of illegal immigration,” partisan gaps exist, but not partisan divisions, on creating a conditional pathway to citizenship (88% of Democrats, 76% of Republicans, 81% overall, find it very or somewhat effective); increasing border security (55% of Democrats, 93% of Republicans, and 70% overall); fining businesses that hire illegal immigrants (54% of Democrats, 83% of Republicans, and 65% overall); and separating immigrant children from their parents (10% of Democrats, 40% of Republicans, and 23% overall). The partisan dynamics seen on other issues in this chapter appear regarding border security (38% partisan gap) and child separation (30% partisan gap).

At the same time, while these partisan gaps exist, a majoritarian agreement remains on these policies. The one issue where majoritarian disagreement exists is regarding increasing the number of arrests and deportations, where 83% of Republicans find the policy somewhat or very effective and only 29% of Democrats concur (52% overall) (Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2019). In sum, while the underlying partisan gaps about immigration appear to predate the Trump Doctrine, attitudes toward the particular immigration policies of the Trump Doctrine seem to respond in the same manner as seen elsewhere in this chapter, with divisions emerging around highlighted policies.
Conclusion—The End of Foreign Policy Exceptionalism

This chapter suggests that the public’s reaction to the Trump Doctrine reflects somewhat of a culmination of previous trends. While partisanship has always been one of the largest factors accounting for public attitudes toward foreign policy (Holsti 2004), the degree of partisan differences as well as recent shifts in public attitudes suggests that the drivers of opinion on foreign policy are becoming more like those of domestic policy. As with domestic policy, political leaders largely focus a partisan lens on foreign policy. As the most prominent voice, it would be expected that President Trump would potentially have the largest influence. Across a number of foreign policy issues and with only a few exceptions, the public’s reactions to the elements of the Trump Doctrine reflect this reaction to Trump’s positions. While the Trump Doctrine did not cause these trends, the choices of which issues to highlight (such as immigration) likely exacerbated it.

While it is too soon to evaluate how the 2020 coronavirus pandemic affected foreign policy attitudes, a brief speculation is in order. Partisans will likely react to the coronavirus’s foreign policy aspects consistent with their overall views. Democrats will likely interpret the pandemic as supporting their inclinations for greater international cooperation to respond to and combat infectious disease while Republicans will view the pandemic as supporting their view for greater limitations on the flows of people across borders and the work of international organizations (such as the World Health Organization). In the end, the main influence of the pandemic will likely be to reinforce preexisting foreign policy attitudes than change them.

A number of structural and attitudinal changes that have accelerated since the early 2000s fundamentally altered how public opinion interacts with foreign policy (Foyle 2017). Political elites, especially the president (Druckman and Jacobs 2015), appear to be more responsive to narrower sets of interests as they have adapted to both the media environment and the potential uses of modern polling mechanisms. President Trump’s use of Twitter to communicate and his emphasis on potentially divisive foreign policy issues enhanced this effect. It has long been recognized that political incentives exist for governing elites to frame issues in a way to gain the most partisan advantage (Schattschneider 1960). Elites are
incentivized to draw the “lines of cleavage” in a manner that is advantageous to them politically. Most often, these lines of cleavage have been drawn regarding domestic issues (Buchler and Kopko 2016). Now, even if the broad “top of the pyramid” foreign policy issues reflect a general consensus, politicians seem to be turning to foreign policy to emphasize the aspects of disagreement on more specific aspects of foreign policy issues in a way that advantages them politically. In short, the lines of cleavage are now being drawn in foreign policy. Given this approach’s political advantages, this tactic by political elites will likely continue and mask underlying factors that more unite than divide the American public.

Two things appear to be occurring with public opinion. First, broad inclinations regarding foreign policy appear not to have changed in a dramatic manner. These areas of agreement appear not to receive as much attention as those of disagreement. Second, on the highlighted aspects of the Trump Doctrine, such as immigration and Russia, attitudes seem to have become more partisan. As political leaders have become more polarized in their policy positions, research suggests that the public increasingly responds more to partisan cuing than substantively grounded information (Berinsky 2009; Druckman et al. 2013). With the exception of foreign policy means and trade policy, the opinions examined in this chapter seem to be responding to partisan cuing.

The public’s reaction to the Trump Doctrine raises the question as to whether the domestic politics of foreign policy are undermining the broader internationalist foundations of the US-led post-World War II liberal international order. The long-running Chicago Council on Global Affairs poll series cited here extensively concludes that broader internationalist trends remain even though partisan differences exist. At the same time, the America First attitude, disinclination to engage with international organizations, and economic tariffs might seem to imply a loosening of the foreign policy consensus. It is certainly apparent that attitudes break in highly polarized ways if political elites highlight issues such as immigration, climate change, and building American military strength. At the same time, broad swaths of bipartisan consensus exist on a number of issues that the public places at the highest priority, including protecting American jobs, preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction, protecting against cyber-attacks, and dealing with Iranian and North Korean nuclear programs.

There is also broad agreement in how to deal with these problems such as relying on alliance partners, staying engaged in the world, and
pursuing international trade. The Trump Doctrine, by emphasizing areas of partisan disagreement, perhaps creates too strong of an impression of the nature of divisions within American public opinion. Still, with the hyper-partisan nature of elite politics which tends to focus on issues that more divide than unite the public, continued divisions on the most discussed issues seem likely to remain.

Whether politics stops at the water’s edge or is merely the continuation of domestic politics “with its hat on” hinges on the choices of political elites. If they continue to emphasize issues that divide and the divisive aspects of issues where there is agreement, the appearance of partisan division in foreign policy generally will continue. Or, if they choose to focus on areas of bipartisan agreement, a broader consensus is possible. Most fundamentally, Americans agree across political parties about the main foreign policy goals, priorities, and threats. In a way, this observation suggests that the critical choice lies more with political elites than the public. And, in a real sense, this recognition undercuts the notion of foreign policy exceptionalism and hints that foreign policy has become much more like domestic policy for better or for worse.

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