

A New World Order: The New Age of Great Power Competition

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Amid the intensification of conflict in the Middle East among the United States, Iran, Israel, and Iranian proxy groups, partisan tension among lawmakers has grown. This has led to attempts in both chambers of Congress to pass a war powers resolution. The resolution would halt any military action against Iran after a 30-day window without further congressional authorization. These attempts failed in both chambers, largely along partisan lines¹. However, Congress was able to introduce bipartisan legislation on a separate issue, one that, like the conflict in Iran, illustrates a new understanding of the geopolitical situation in which we find ourselves in 2026.

This bipartisan legislation is called the Multilateral Alignment of Technology Controls on Hardware (MATCH) Act. Introduced this April, it aims to strengthen American national security by restricting China's access to advanced semiconductor manufacturing equipment. This would hinder China's ability to compete with the United States in emerging technologies and critical infrastructure. The act implements nationwide bans on the sale of sophisticated semiconductor processing equipment, such as lithography and cryogenic etching machines, to China. It also imposes an alignment requirement by setting deadlines for countries such as the Netherlands and Japan to comply with these export standards. While not as high-profile as a War Powers Resolution, and seemingly overly technical, this bill reflects a shift in lawmakers' views on global power competition.

¹ R-KY-4, Thomas. "H.Con.Res.38 - 119th Congress (2025-2026): Directing the President pursuant to Section 5(C) of the War Powers Resolution to Remove United States Armed Forces from Unauthorized Hostilities in the Islamic Republic of Iran." *Congress.gov*, 2025, www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-concurrent-resolution/38.

In the post-Cold War era, global international relations have largely been defined by unipolar, uncontested American dominance and general global stability. This state of affairs, however, is giving way to a more contested international order. Despite the numerous differences in the priorities of U.S. foreign policy between the Biden and the second Trump administrations, one strategic understanding has remained consistent. In a 2020 joint statement from then-Chairman Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Vice Chairman Mark Warner (D-VA) of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, the committee identified China as “the greatest national security threat to the United States,” adding that, “the Chinese Communist Party will stop at nothing to exert its global dominance.”²

Statements of this nature outline a growing sentiment of policymakers from across the ideological spectrum. The United States has entered a new phase of sustained geopolitical competition with peer and near-peer rivals, most notably China and Russia. While perspectives on how this competition should be assessed vary dramatically across the ideological spectrum, there is a growing understanding among policymakers and experts that the new era of great power competition will require affirmative action by the United States to maintain its current geopolitical position. The implications of this global power dynamic are beyond significant, as Political Scientist Graham Allison outlines: “When a rising power threatens to displace a ruling power, the result is dangerous competition that can reshape the global order.”³

Great power competition (GPC) is not new. It has been observed across great civilizations as far back as ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt in the 4th century BCE, and has been used primarily to describe periods of human history marked by intense geopolitical rivalries between powerful states over influence, resources, or rule-setting

² “Rubio, Warner Joint Statement on National Security Threat Posed by China | Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.” *Senate.gov*, 2026, www.intelligence.senate.gov/2020/12/04/press-rubio-warner-joint-statement-national-security-threat-posed-china/

³ Allison, Graham.

The U.S.-China Strategic Competition: Clues from History.

Aspen Institute, 2020,

<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Allison-Final.pdf>

authority. Conceptually, GPC is rooted in the post-1648 Peace of Westphalia world, which outlined formal international “norms” and established certain states as “Great Powers”⁴. Other periods defined by GPC include the 18th-century competition between France and Great Britain, the 19th-century balance of power between various European states, the 20th-century power dynamics leading up to and following World War I, and the Cold War.

Following the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States emerged as the lone global hegemonic power. With this, we witnessed a transition away from Great Power Competition between peer rival states and towards an interventionist-focused paradigm, often pinning the United States against non-peer rivals as seen during the Gulf War, Iraq War, and War in Panama. This shift would be accelerated by the September 11th terrorist attacks, as American national security concerns would then be centered around counterterrorist operations against non-state insurgents such as the Taliban in Afghanistan, ISIS in Iraq and Syria, and Al-Qaeda throughout the Middle East and North Africa. The extent of this counterterrorist focus was highlighted by a Brown University project, “The Costs of War,” which estimated the total cost of American military operations post-9/11 to be roughly 8 trillion dollars across a 20-year time frame⁵.

Today, we are witnessing the continuation of the shift away from this counterterrorist geopolitical focus towards a focus on interstate competition with peer or near-peer rivals. This competition is not confined only to military dominance. Rather, it prioritizes economic interdependence, technological innovation, coalition building, and ideological influence.

Despite polarization in U.S. policymaking, Republicans and Democrats share fundamental concerns about America’s evolving geopolitical situation. There is broad bipartisan agreement that Chinese economic, technological, and military advancement poses serious strategic challenges to American interests. Chinese advancements in

⁴ Lynch, Thomas F. “The Future of Great Power Competition.” *The Routledge Handbook of Great Power Competition*, 29 July 2024, pp. 303–326,

⁵ Kimball, Jill. “Costs of the 20-Year War on Terror: \$8 Trillion and 900,000 Deaths.” *Brown University*, 1 Sept. 2021, www.brown.edu/news/2021-09-01/costsofwar.

artificial intelligence, critical infrastructure development, rare-earth mineral processing, and green-water naval development are all critical areas where U.S. leadership is being challenged.

Furthermore, the Russian Federation's recent willingness to use military force, cyberwarfare, and energy coercion as leverage to achieve its strategic goals has only reinforced bipartisan support for collective security organizations such as NATO. This support is so profound that the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024, a law that included a provision stating a requirement for a two-thirds Senate vote or an act of Congress to withdraw from NATO, passed both chambers of Congress with overwhelming bipartisan support⁶.

As such, partisan divides typically emerge not over the recognition of this new era of great power competition, but rather over the mechanisms by which the U.S. engages in this competition. Republican policymakers have emphasized military strength, greater economic independence, and direct confrontation with adversarial states through the Reagan-era “peace through strength” approach, which seeks to uphold America’s geopolitical dominance through forward displays of power. This was outlined through the Taiwan Peace through Strength Act of 2023. This bill, which failed to ever receive a floor vote in either chamber, was introduced by House Representative Jim Banks (R-IN-3) and aimed at directly strengthening Taiwanese defenses to deter Chinese aggression and providing a legal framework for the United States to defend Taiwan militarily⁷.

This kind of policymaking establishes clear and significant consequences for adversarial aggression, fosters a more dynamic decision-making environment during a crisis, and strengthens American control over vital supply chains without relying on external assistance. This reliance being something that has even been criticized by

⁶ “Separation of Powers and NATO Withdrawal.” *Congress.gov*, 2026, www.congress.gov/crs-product/R48868.

⁷ R-IN-3, Jim. “Text - H.R.5072 - 118th Congress (2023-2024): Taiwan Peace through Strength Act of 2023.” *Congress.gov*, 2023, www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/5072/text.

some Democrats, particularly with regard to semiconductor supply chains. This was outlined by former Biden-era Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo during a speech at the 2023 Reagan National Defense Forum: “It’s not okay if we deny China something, and the Japanese and the Germans are selling them component parts to make a EUV tool. Not okay,”⁸ At the same time, however, these measures pose a significant risk of escalation, potentially spiraling geopolitical situations into conflict, undermining multilateral alliances, alienating allies, and even proving economically unsustainable over the long term.

Democratic policymakers, by contrast, tend to place greater emphasis on coalition-building and maintaining multilateral alliances, such as NATO, to project power, something Former President Joe Biden outlined in his inaugural address: “We will repair our alliances and engage with the world once again.”⁹ Additionally, Democrats place strong emphasis on non-traditional security concerns, such as climate change and its potential impact on security dynamics among great powers, with former Secretary of State Antony Blinken referring to it as a “threat multiplier.”¹⁰ Finally, they generally oppose large-scale economic decoupling, especially at the expense of domestic markets, preferring targeted economic restrictions in specific critical sectors. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan explicitly stated that the Biden administration's goal was centered on “de-risking, not decoupling.”¹¹

These positions place greater emphasis on geopolitical cooperation, improving legitimacy and burden-sharing concerns, reducing the risk of escalation through

⁸ Hitchens, Theresa. ““Game On”: Raimondo Calls for Beefing up Tech Export Controls to Counter China.” *Breaking Defense*, 2 Dec. 2023, breakingdefense.com/2023/12/game-on-raimondo-calls-for-beefing-up-tech-export-controls-to-counter-china/.

⁹ “Inaugural Address | the American Presidency Project.” *Www.presidency.ucsb.edu*, www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/inaugural-address-53.

¹⁰ *Climateandsecurity.org*, 2026, climateandsecurity.org/2021/12/climate-change-must-be-at-the-center-of-our-national-defense-strategy/.

¹¹ “Remarks by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan at the Brookings Institution | the American Presidency Project.” *Ucsb.edu*, 2021, www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-the-brookings-institution.

diplomatic resolutions, and employing economic interdependence as leverage against peer rivals like China without disrupting large-scale trade. At the same time, these positions risk creating strategic ambiguity that rivals can exploit, a concern raised by critics in situations such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Additionally, a significant concern rests in the aforementioned reliance on allies that may not share the exact same geopolitical interests. These dynamics may be perceived as a weakness by adversarial states, who may, in turn, be emboldened to pursue aggressive actions.

These competing approaches, while entrenched in partisanship, reflect a genuine strategic dilemma: whether a greater risk lies in provoking escalation or failing to deter it in the first place. Ultimately, the success of American foreign policy in this era will be determined not by partisan victory but rather by policymakers' ability to formulate sustained action. Policymakers must fully recognize that great power competition is not confined to election cycles; it is a defining feature of the contemporary international system. The reemergence of interstate competition, especially during a time in which nations possess weapons of mass destruction, poses an existential threat to global security. It also poses an opportunity to forge a bipartisan foreign policy that aligns American power with strategic precision. Whether the U.S. can seize this opportunity will determine both its position in this new world order and what this order looks like for the world.