



SEPTEMBER 2021

# Back to (Caring about) the Future

CSIS Congressional Foresight Initiative

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## Launching the CSIS Congressional Foresight Initiative

Liberal democracy has many advantages over other systems of government. However, it often prioritizes short-term fixes over long-range planning and action. Members of the U.S. Congress face voters every two to six years, and they are seldom rewarded for “near-term pain for long-term gain” approaches to issues. As a result, Congress often passes on pressing challenges affecting international security and national competitiveness to future generations.

Most nations’ failure to adequately prepare for and contain the Covid-19 pandemic, an event which had been

considered increasingly likely by foresight practitioners for some time, is just one example of how foresight needs improved translation into policy. In an era defined by trends such as economic reordering, unprecedented and accelerating levels of climate change, shifting demographics, and renewed geostrategic competition, the ability to implement foresight is critical to U.S. security and prosperity. Lawmakers and their staff will need to meaningfully engage with these issues to prepare for the future and to forge their legacies. Indeed, those who develop a commitment to overcoming these challenges will determine the long-term success of the American experiment.

Understanding the critical role the U.S. Congress plays in that success, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) organized the Congressional Foresight Initiative, led by Elizabeth Hoffman, director of Con-



gressional and Government Affairs, and Erol Yayboke, director of the Project on Fragility and Mobility and senior fellow with the International Security Program. The Congressional Foresight Initiative is designed to foster new opportunities for bipartisan collaboration to address challenges to international peace and prosperity, infused with a multi-year and multi-decade understanding of the stakes. The initiative highlights best practices in long-range strategic planning and its implementation in government drawn from around the globe.

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The objective of the first year of the initiative was to enhance congressional staffs' understanding of long-range trends and use of foresight through a series of briefings on the intersection of international security and four key issue areas: geoeconomics, climate change, demographics, and governance. The year ended with a three-part conference on the implementation of strategic foresight. The congressional staff participants represented a bipartisan, bicameral group from both personal offices and committees.

This report examines the key insights, findings, and discussions that emerged as part of the first year of the Congressional Foresight Initiative. It also considers ways in which members of Congress and their staff can effectively adopt, implement, and sustain the practice of foresight today.

## **With the Benefit of Foresight**

There are two ways to get the future precisely wrong. The first is not to consider or willingly ignore it. At the heart of the Congressional Foresight Initiative is the mission to strengthen congressional staffers' abilities to think beyond short-term solutions by engaging with

### **The Mont Fleur Scenarios**

The Mont Fleur scenario exercise, undertaken in Cape Town in 1991–92, was critical to forging an inclusive and lasting democracy in South Africa. One of the most famous uses of foresight, the exercise convened 22 prominent South African politicians, activists, academics, and business-people from across the ideological spectrum to consider one question: "What will South Africa be like in the year 2002?"<sup>1</sup>

Four novel stories emerged from the exercise, each describing a different outcome for the country as influenced by a variety of factors and stakeholder decisions. Following the conclusion of the exercise, a report was published in a national newspaper and a video was produced for dissemination. Participants also presented the scenarios to political parties, companies, academics, trade unions, and civic organizations.

Though South Africa today is still dealing with the lingering consequences of apartheid, the scenario-based foresight exercise in the early 1990s had a pronounced effect in forging a mutual understanding between ideologically opposed stakeholders that would be critical in the early success of a newly reconstituted democracy. It also produced longer lasting informal networks, created shared terminology, and built public trust during a tumultuous time of extreme political division.

policy experts on the most pressing international security issues. Simply put, the future cannot afford to be ignored.

The second way to get the future wrong is for one to profess that they can predict it with certain accuracy. For the purposes of this paper, foresight is defined as distinct from forecasting. Whereas forecasting is an attempt to predict the future, foresight understands the future as an emerging entity that is only partially visible in the present, built on an evidence base that is always evolving and incomplete.<sup>2</sup> As such, the objective of foresight is not to "get the future right" but to study and reframe the spectrum of plausible developments that need to be taken into consideration for a range of uses.

Foresight is a lens that can be applied for many purposes. It is often used to build capabilities and prepare for potential shocks, to tackle complex and big picture challenges, or to incorporate emerging trends across different issue areas.<sup>3</sup> For lawmakers specifically, foresight is a tool that, if used the right way, can provide structure to thinking about future uncertainties and link possible futures to present actions.

### **Arthur Vandenberg: A Historic Congressional Foresight-er**

Born and raised in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Senator Arthur Vandenberg became the architect of several multilateral organizations that have come to define international society today.

At first an ardent isolationist, Senator Vandenberg strongly opposed U.S. involvement in World War II. However, the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor precipitated his change to internationalism and by 1945, his views had changed dramatically. He gave a rousing speech in January of that year on the Senate floor, declaring his conversion from isolationism to internationalism and laying the groundwork for a forward-looking, bipartisan foreign policy that would create economic stability and peace in the post-war era.

In April 1945, Senator Vandenberg was appointed as a delegate to the United Nations Conference on International Organization, which paved the way for the creation of the United Nations. He also worked across the aisle to garner support for the Truman Doctrine of 1947, the Marshall Plan of 1948, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949. His belief in bipartisan foreign policy is encapsulated in one of his most famous lines: "We must stop politics at the water's edge."<sup>4</sup>

Though he may not have used the exact term, Senator Vandenberg employed foresight to better understand post-war trends, which in turn informed his advocacy for the creation of key multilateral organizations. His commitment to global security illustrates the important role of foresight in the U.S. Congress toward securing the nation's collective future.

Despite its reputation for focusing on near-term issues, Congress is likely the best positioned branch of the U.S. government to operationalize foresight and provide policy continuity over the medium and long term. While the executive branch has substantial influence in defining and promoting policy priorities, the presidency is also a pendulum that with each swing wipes clean many existing plans, strategies, and actions. On the other hand, many members of Congress serve for decades, with key staff who have a great deal of influence in defining and executing their member's or committee's policy agenda. In addition, Congress possesses centers of institutional knowledge, experience, and longevity in its standing committees that are commensurate with and at times surpass those of the executive branch. As such, Congress should embrace its responsibility to confront the nation's most pressing long-term challenges.

Indeed, far-sighted legislation has defined the trajectory of the United States at key moments throughout history. From Senator Arthur Vandenberg's role in establishing crucial global security and economic institutions after the second world war to the Church Committee reforms of the intelligence community in the 1970s and Goldwater-Nichols reforms to the defense apparatus in the 1980s, Congress has undeniably developed long-sighted policies throughout history that have directly shaped enduring U.S. prosperity and international security.

## **Four Trends to Watch through a Foresight Lens**

Foresight is crucial for tackling the world's preeminent challenges, particularly in an era of renewed geostrategic competition with authoritarian competitors. While U.S. politicians must answer to voters in frequent elections and are therefore incentivized to appeal to near-term fixes, authoritarian regimes are not held to the same standards of accountability. That is not to say that Xi Jinping or Vladimir Putin never act in the interest of their citizens, but rather that long-term strategies are easier to plan and execute when there is little to no challenge to the seating of the central government.

Admittedly, this framing is imperfect. For example, Chinese Community Party (CCP) leaders must respond

vigorously to any hint of unrest and care greatly about near-term growth because, without the mandate of the voters, such growth is foundational to assuring support of their institutions. However, with cemented leadership and increasing control over the population, the CCP's ability to conduct long-term planning is only growing.<sup>5</sup> In addition to its 14th Five-Year Plan, the CCP recently published China Vision 2035—a 15-year socioeconomic development strategy—and continues to commit trillions to multi-year infrastructure projects.<sup>6</sup>

Importantly, there also exists a risk of entrenching mistakes in long-term planning. China's one-child policy, adopted in 1979, created a favorable age dependency ratio that greatly contributed to the country's economic growth.<sup>7</sup> However, in addition to perpetrating gross violations of individual freedoms, Beijing's approach to managing population growth set China on the path toward a demographic cliff.<sup>8</sup> In this way, the capability to shape trends does not automatically translate into effective foresight planning.

Nonetheless, with the power of U.S. rivals on the rise, adopting foresight is not only necessary to overcoming the challenges of the twenty-first century, but also to maintaining the United States' strategic edge over its competitors. The following four sections outline key trends related to international security that U.S. congressional staffers—and other policymakers and practitioners—should watch through a foresight lens.

### Disclaimer

Developed after briefings with experts from the United States and around the globe, the following sections contain statements and figures presented to attendees on a non-attribution basis. For that reason, citations have been omitted.

## Geoeconomics

Geoeconomics is the use of economic instruments such as trade, investment, cyber espionage and exploitation, sanctions, and monetary policy to advance international policy objectives and influence. An example of geoeconomics in action includes former president Trump threatening to limit U.S. security commitments

to Saudi Arabia to reduce oil production, using unique U.S. economic and technological leverage to achieve a desired policy outcome.

Interest in geoeconomic analysis has surged in recent years among academic, think tank, and government communities. Geoeconomics offers an interdisciplinary approach for analysis to the interconnected and transnational nature of major challenges facing the United States today, including climate change, shifting economic patterns, and the Covid-19 pandemic. In this way, geoeconomics is part of a triad of analytic lenses that also includes geotechnology and geopolitics. These are to be viewed as “languages” of change, and it is incumbent on congressional staff and others following these issues to improve their fluency across these interconnected areas.

At the center of future global economic power is the issue of supply chains. Throughout history, great powers have cultivated and leveraged supply chains to compete for influence. Today, the United States and China use trade agreements, supply chain alliances, market shares, industrial policy, and other levers in a great supply chain tug-of-war. However, this global competition breeds uncertainty for many. As a result, economic power is fragmenting as nations increasingly sort themselves into more self-sufficient economic regions.

In this environment, the best way to position the United States is as a competitive service provider, not the global hegemon. The ability of the United States to succeed, including in pushing back on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with offerings of its own, will depend on how attractive its global utilities (e.g., finance, technology, etc.)

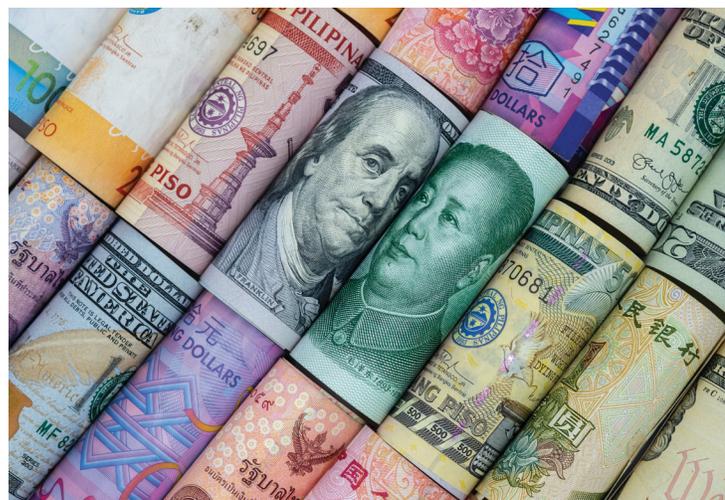


PHOTO SOURCE: DILUK/ADOBE STOCK

are relative to those offered by competitors, as well as the willingness of governments to invest more heavily in the infrastructure that enhances competitive connectivity.

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To make effective use of goeconomic tools and to rely less on the military for achieving geopolitical aims, U.S. leaders will need to change their ideological predispositions about how the United States can exert influence globally. They will also need to reconsider the neoliberal model that has been at the core of so much U.S. foreign policy, which unhelpfully emphasizes limited government interference in markets. As analysts and policymakers imagine a new economic philosophy to inform domestic and foreign policy, certain changes in key assumptions are required. Chief among these is to rethink the relative risk of debt compared to economic stagnation and to

### **Goeconomics Questions for Congress to Consider**

1. What are the structural challenges that Congress faces to effectively develop knowledge, oversight, and legislation that address goeconomic challenges?
2. What will a new political consensus on trade look like?
3. What goeconomics tools are at the Congress's disposal?
4. How can the United States better leverage its goeconomic comparative advantages (e.g., currency, market share, technology) in response to China's industrial policy and Belt and Road Initiative?

take advantage of extremely low borrowing costs. The second is to revisit the idea of industrial policy to keep up with countries such as China that are aggressively implementing such spending strategies.

## **Climate Change**

The far-reaching and fundamental impacts of climate change on international security have gathered momentum and grown significantly in the past several years. Countries and international organizations alike have become more aware of the necessity to predict, prevent, and prepare for climate-related risks. In its 2016 Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, the European Union significantly increased its emissions mitigation targets while seeking to strengthen the resilience of poorer communities, improve military coordination for delivering emergency aid, and build multilateral cooperation on climate issues. In 2015, the Netherlands launched the Planetary Security Initiative, a holistic approach to climate change that recognizes a spectrum of risks, such as the loss of natural ecosystems and resources, and brings together experts and policymakers from a wide range of backgrounds. Today, the United Nations Security Council more frequently references climate-related risks in its resolutions than ever before. And in the United States, President Biden's appointment of John Kerry to serve as the U.S. special presidential envoy for climate with a seat on the National Security Council marks a turning point. The Biden administration is requiring climate-related risks to be taken into consideration in its defense and investment strategies.

Previous predictions from scientists have proven accurate in the forecasting of global warming. Today, the Earth's average temperature is about 1.2 °C above pre-industrial levels and based on current trajectory, it could rise much higher than the 2 °C target limit set by the 2015 Paris Agreement. Getting back on a pathway to a maximum 1.5 °C rise requires a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 7 percent annually over the next decade. While temperature rise has thus far been correctly forecasted, some of the overall impacts of global warming have been underestimated. For instance, ice sheets are melting faster than scientists expected. This will have consequences for sea level rise and, in turn, for people who live in coastal communities.

Climate change will also act as a threat multiplier in volatile and vulnerable parts of the world. Key changes



PHOTO SOURCE: LUKJONIS/ADOBE STOCK

to the environment will alter global food production patterns, increase the frequency and severity of droughts, exacerbate humanitarian crises, heighten the need for development assistance, raise forced migration levels, and create political instability and fertile grounds for terrorist activities. Many of these consequences are already occurring across the Sahel region of Africa and in places like Syria.

Climate change will also create new challenges and concerns in the Arctic region amid geostrategic competition between the United States, Russia, and China. Russia, with a fleet of over 40 icebreakers—compared to just one such operational ship for the United States—is claiming the Northern Sea Route and opening dozens of military bases to strengthen its presence in the region. Similarly, China is seeking to increase its influence in the Arctic, particularly through its Polar Silk Road ambitions.

Elsewhere in the world, sea level rise, heat waves, wildfires, and floods are increasing threats to troops, jeopardizing military installations, and degrading the military readiness of the United States and its allies. Future security challenges posed by climate change include long and severe droughts that cripple U.S. food production and global food supply chains, volatile food prices that dampen economic growth, and other climate-related natural disasters that create an unprecedented flow of migrants. If unprepared for this future, government response capacity will be overwhelmed. This is true not only in developing countries but across the developed world, and undoubtedly in the United States.

As such, the United States must assess its capacity both domestically and within the international system

to meet the demands that climate change will place on security, alliances, and international organizations. Such an assessment will require a holistic approach that anticipates climate change risks and considers cascading impacts on not only the environment, but on economies, societies, and international security.

Climate change mitigation and adaptation are equally important, and the United States has sufficient capabilities to pursue both simultaneously. To do so requires companies, banks, investors, and federal agencies to consider the impact of climate change on their operations, maintain the deployment of clean energy throughout the U.S. economy, and build durable infrastructure in the electric power sector to be climate resilient. Policymakers should undertake security capacity mapping and stress test U.S. alliances and partnerships relative to climate challenges, engage in capacity building to improve economic resilience in the face of climate crises, modernize U.S. infrastructure to build greater climate resilience, and prepare for the inevitable rise in the number of people forcibly displaced by climate change.

### **Climate Change Questions for Congress to Consider**

1. How can Congress use increasingly precise climate data and modeling to inform policy decisions?
2. How can Congress develop a bipartisan and durable approach to foreign policy that reorients U.S. and global institutions toward prioritizing climate change and taking a multidisciplinary approach to the problem?
3. What policies can Congress develop to simultaneously pursue climate change mitigation and adaptation?
4. How can Congress support efforts to map security capacity between the United States and its allies in responding to climate-related events?
5. What are the many steps—rather than one big step—that Congress can take to advance clean energy and climate resilience?
6. What steps should Congress take to improve engagement in the Arctic?

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### Demographics

Understanding the implications of demographic shifts is necessary to prepare for a variety of future threats and opportunities. It is therefore no wonder policymakers often turn to demographics as a “crystal ball” to make what they consider to be high-confidence judgments about future national competitiveness, whether predicting the likely economic development of a given country or the projected size of its workforce or military-age recruits. However, the real impact of demographic change is much more complex than the popular straight-line conclusions or snapshot analyses that are often drawn. The phrase “demography is destiny” may be true to the extent that total fertility rate projections have proven to be largely accurate in forecasting relative population growth and the resulting age structure within countries. However, demographic transitions are only one of multiple factors that must be assessed when considering human health and development within a country, let alone relative power and influence of given countries in the international system.

Demographic trends tell us that the world is experiencing several major, regionalized population shifts. The African population is forecasted to double by 2050. One-third of the population of NATO countries will be over the age of 65 by the 2040s. And major U.S. competitors, including Russia and China, are bracing for a sharp decline in the relative size of their workforces.

However, such projections are only as reliable as the assumptions and information inputted to generate them, and even slight variations can create massive differences in and between forecasts. Policymakers are most often shown medium-variant forecasts of demographic trendlines, but low and high forecasts—either of which are plausible—can produce starkly different outcomes. For example, the gap between the low- and

high-end UN projections of the global population in 2035 is more than half a billion people. Moreover, some projections assume no variance in fertility, mortality, and migration rates—any of which could change at any time for a variety of reasons. As such, the utility of demography in policymaking must be grounded in adequate context. Members of Congress and their staff can use demographic trends as one tool of many by which to judge long-term possibilities resulting from short-term decisions.

At its core, the field of demography is a study of three key variables: fertility, mortality, and migration. Using these three variables, demographers can create models to predict trends in populations, where each variable is a dial that can be turned up or down to produce a markedly different outcome. For example, a country with sharply declining fertility will experience population contraction and aging. That could, however, be countered by turning up the immigration dial and allowing more people into the country to offset population decline.

Demographic trends are often cited when it comes to the economic potential of developing countries, especially regarding the “demographic dividend.” A demographic dividend refers to the economic growth potential that can result from a population’s age structure shifting favorably toward a higher ratio of working-age producers compared to non-working-age dependents. The most striking modern example of this was the rise of the “Four Asian Tigers” in the second half of the twentieth century. From 1965 to 1990, the per capita income in South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong increased by more than 6 percent each year. At the peak of this trend

PHOTO SOURCE: ALEXANDER OZEROV/ADOBE STOCK



in East Asia, there were two and a half workers for every dependent, contributing greatly to the region's positive economic output and overall development.

Importantly, the demographic dividend was not solely responsible for the economic miracle in East Asia, nor will it be wholly determinant in other countries and regions that will experience similar population shifts in the decades ahead. While the favorable age structure did create a window of opportunity for rapid development, several other policies were enacted in tandem with demographic shifts to realize the region's growth potential. As the workforce grew to more than double the number of dependents, there was increased investment in human capital, increased access to primary and secondary schooling, increased investment in maternal and child health, broadened access to family planning and reproductive health services, high employment rates in sectors with a global comparative advantage, trade liberalization, increased foreign direct investments, and a focus on export-oriented policies. This insight is critical to realizing the economic potential of sub-Saharan Africa, where an impending population boom may present a similar opportunity for rapid economic development if coupled with the right government policies. Likewise, policymakers must consider the intersection of demographic trends with other impending challenges. In developing states, fertility, mortality, and emigration rates are exacerbated by poor or nonexistent health systems, and threats such as climate change and unstable governance only make these issues worse.

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Today, East Asia and nearly all other developed regions face a very different problem: rapid aging. People over the age of 65 outnumber those under the age of 5 globally, and the number of persons aged 80 years or over is expected to triple to nearly half a billion by 2050. Despite massive differences in terms of total population, the median age, total fertility rate, and average life expectancy between

Russia, China, and the United States are all nearly identical. Working populations have also peaked in all three countries, save for immigration policy where the United States has benefitted in offsetting its decreasing total fertility rate through the inflow of immigrants.

The United States stands at a demographic inflection point. Public health investments to increase life expectancy are feasible but ambitious, and boosting fertility rates through incentive programs has been shown across multiple countries to fail in creating sustained population growth. Of the three variables that dictate demographic trends, migration is the one most under government control. Members of Congress have the choice between turning the immigration dial up to compensate for a shrinking workforce or dealing with the consequences of an aging population. If the United States favors aging over immigration, several critical challenges emerge. Support systems for older-age dependents will have

### **Demographics Questions for Congress to Consider**

1. What assumptions about domestic and international policies might be made more accurate by a more detailed assessment of demographic trends?
2. What tools can Congress develop to integrate long-term demographic considerations into its short-term policy?
3. How can the immigration debate in the United States better include accurate accounting of the impact of migration policy on offsetting population decline and aging in the country?
4. How can the United States influence and invest in sub-Saharan Africa in a way that seizes the demographic dividend emerging in the region?
5. What implications does a shrinking population have on military preparedness and adapting force posture for the United States, its allies, and its adversaries?
6. How do ongoing technology-driven trends (e.g., worker automation) play alongside demographic trends?

to be redesigned to care for larger portions of society, including social security, pensions, and the retirement system. Likewise, U.S. strategy and force posture will have to adapt to rely less on military manpower, as already exemplified by Russia, which has turned to cyberspace to offset loss in conventional force numbers. Finally, keeping individuals healthier and in the workforce for longer periods of their life will be critical to address the deceleration of productivity as the overall population ages. Whether and how to adjust the immigration dial is a choice for policymakers who must consider how best to prepare for the long-term consequences of their immediate actions.

## World Order

Government responses around the globe to the Covid-19 pandemic have demonstrated a fatal lack of strategic planning and preparation, especially for a crisis long heralded as not a matter of “if” but “when.” Indeed, the pandemic has exposed several collective weaknesses in liberal democracies and the existing world order. Rather than creating solidarity and deepening cooperation around a common threat, the pandemic has exacerbated existing political fault lines.

Beyond reactive approaches to crisis management, the pandemic also exposed many countries’ failures to proactively adapt to a new digital world. Across Europe and the United States, health infrastructure is hamstrung by outdated digital technologies, and both suffer from insidious disinformation campaigns that continue to damage vaccination efforts. Such campaigns exploit issues that generally predate Covid-19 and have been afflicting liberal democracies for years: complacency in the face of globalization that has led to rapid but unequal growth, democratic backsliding, and increased threats from authoritarian and other non-democratic actors. As a result, the pandemic has weakened an already fading sense of solidarity within and between liberal democracies. Their overall lackluster pandemic performance highlights the need to establish common priorities to deliver solutions not just to Covid-19, but to that which ailed democratic societies pre-pandemic. These priorities could include more sustained anti-corruption efforts, meaningful progress on migration issues, and perhaps most importantly, a reinvigoration of shared values and goals to reverse democratic backsliding. It is toward these and other critical priorities to which the post-Covid-19 world order must shift.

The pandemic has also transformed international relations and accelerated key geopolitical trends that bring such a shift of priorities into the realm of possibility. Transatlantic relations have served as the backbone of the post–World War II order. But today, Europe and the United States should broaden their strategic partnerships to further engage like-minded countries such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, Singapore, and Canada. A close bloc of countries bound by shared values rather than geography is a strategy to ensure preparedness for future crises and challenges.

In exposing risks in the global supply chains of strategic goods, the Covid-19 pandemic has also accelerated efforts to assess and realign critical channels of production, trade, and investment. Such efforts have increased tensions with China, as highlighted in recent months by the frozen Comprehensive Agreement on Investment between China and the European Union. The Indo-Pacific region is today the main geostrategic theater of competition, and it is here that the immediate future of the world order will be determined. China understands this playing field, as evidenced by its own recent “pivot to Asia.” As a result, countries in the Indo-Pacific region must navigate an increasingly difficult set of circumstances and options. China’s muscular diplomacy forces prospective regional partners to choose between the extremes of domination or exclusion. This makes it difficult for many Indo-Pacific nations—especially the less economically developed—to have constructive relationships with China while also maintaining economic and political independence and productive relationships with China’s perceived rivals.

To counter China’s increased assertiveness, the United States recently adopted the Japanese vision for a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP) that prioritizes free trade, the rule of law, and a commitment to peace and stability in the region. Although originally designed by Japan to coexist with China’s economic ambitions, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, FOIP has been increasingly framed as an alternative to Chinese control, particularly as the U.S.-China rivalry intensifies. For Japan, a staunch U.S. ally, the collision of economic (China is Japan’s top trading partner) and ideological (Japan is a liberal democracy) objectives poses a challenge. Japan has long maintained a unique political balance of strategic interests with both China and the United States, but China’s increasing assertiveness and the United States’ own confrontational responses are forcing it and many Indo-Pacific nations to pick sides—something they have long avoided doing.



PHOTO SOURCE: CHUNGKING/ADOBE STOCK

Japan is addressing the increasing tension between its economic and ideological interests in ways that could significantly reshape the future world order. Two of its efforts are particularly notable. First, it is further aligning itself with like-minded liberal democracies, which together may be capable of reshaping China's behavior and interests. On March 12, 2021, the heads of state from Japan, the United States, Australia, and India gathered virtually for the first ever leader-level summit of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. The 2021 "Quad" gathering demonstrated a new level of commitment to cooperation and the need to strengthen the rule of law, democracy, and human rights; all not-so-subtle refutations of China's international approach.

The second Japanese effort to mediate tension between its economic and ideological interests is a pivot toward the Indian Ocean Rim, a region with tremendous potential for economic growth and partnership that could reduce regional reliance on China. However, while the United States and Japan attempt to rally like-minded countries and realign their economic interests, Beijing is increasingly abandoning the traditional world order, as it works to consolidate its influence among a bloc of Asian countries. In 2020, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) became China's largest trading partner. With ASEAN and elsewhere, China is increasingly signaling its disregard for the interests of traditional powers, prioritizing its capability to influence developing economies.

In the near term, international pandemic recovery efforts present an opportunity for the United States, Europe, Japan, and other like-minded nations to outcompete China

for global influence. In April 2021, China's top disease control official tacitly admitted that its current vaccines offer limited protection against Covid-19, as cases continue to rise in recipient nations. Meanwhile, at the Quad summit one month earlier, the four leaders committed to expand India's private sector vaccine production by one billion doses by the end of 2022, principally to benefit ASEAN member states. As of August 2021, the United States had provided over 23 million doses of vaccines and over \$158 million in emergency pandemic assistance to ASEAN member states. Such efforts should continue to be scaled up to prevent regionalized epidemics or the creation of variants that threaten vaccine effectiveness. With its own successful vaccine development and initial rollout, the United States is uniquely positioned to join Europe and play a greater role in global pandemic recovery. Such efforts will not only benefit other nations, but also promote U.S. strategic interests and security. This is a prime opportunity to prove that democracy can deliver.

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Finally, it is also necessary to recognize the limitations of strategic foresight to accurately predict how the pandemic will influence the future world order. From vaccines to variants, the pandemic is changing almost daily, often with significant health, economic, and geostrategic consequences. Covid-19 has accelerated some trends and created others. How these trends continue to play out over the coming months and years could determine the trajectory of the world order in unforeseen ways. Nonetheless, the pandemic is heightening long-standing political grievances and tensions within and between countries around the world. Left unaddressed, these will collide with other trends like climate change and rising authoritarianism, setting the stage for a disrupted and disjointed future characterized by more political violence, migration crises, and humanitarian emergencies. But it does not have to be that way. Non-democratic regimes are failing to deliver Covid-19 solutions fast enough,

## World Order Questions for Congress to Consider

1. What can Congress do to build and strengthen longer-term international partnerships capable of withstanding polarized domestic political environments?
2. What should U.S. global leadership look like in a post-Covid-19 world order?
3. How can Congress push for reform within existing international institutions that sets up the future world order for success?
4. How can the United States use its development of several successful Covid-19 vaccines to prove globally that democracy can still deliver?
5. What are the best ways to economically and ideologically engage with Indo-Pacific countries who are not fully aligned with China but hesitant to pick sides?

while younger generations across the United States, Europe, and Japan do not seek a return to the pre-pandemic status quo. If the current world order can deliver a better model out of the crisis, the future world order might look very different than if it cannot.

## Implementing Foresight

Foresight is a way of thinking that draws upon the partial evidence of the present to more thoughtfully consider plausible futures. In this way, current analysis of trends and the facts that underpin them are the basis of foresight. Indeed, there is clear evidence of key shifts in geoeconomics, climate change, demographics, and the world order. The challenge, then, is turning a foresight-driven appreciation of these trends into corresponding action.

As part of the Congressional Foresight Initiative, CSIS organized a three-part capstone conference on “Strategic Foresight in Action.” The conference provided congressional staff participants the opportunity to learn about foresight from individuals and teams who are recognized globally

## Looking beyond Congress

From government agencies that may be tasked with specific foresight responsibilities to private organizations that seek to shape the future through policy, various partners have an important role to play in improving the use of foresight in Congress.

Foundational to these efforts is building relationships with policymakers and their staff. Toward this end, foresight cannot be conducted solely upstream. Foresight is a frame of mind that permeates all steps to coordinate goals and outcomes, determine policy efficacy, and enable cross-government collaboration. Integrating policymakers throughout the foresight processes and engaging them as they craft legislation is one way for stakeholders to have greater impact. Likewise, preparing a suite of analysis and recommendations that speak to different issues and concerns of policymakers is crucial to generating deeper interest on the Hill.

Even in failure to gain traction on a specific long-range issue, starting a dialogue and laying the foundation of engaged policymakers is valuable. After all, foresight practitioners must be comfortable with failure. The benefit of global trends is that because they loom so large, one failure (or one success) alone will rarely be enough to fundamentally change the overall trajectory. It is persistent efforts to spark conversations about the future that define the success of foresight. Without such conversations today, we stand little chance of being prepared for the challenges of tomorrow.

for their commitment to long-range trends assessment and planning. The key insights that emerged from the capstone conference are detailed below.

## Foresight Insights for Lawmakers and Their Staff

In politics, facts are not always enough. For a variety of reasons, lawmakers may be incentivized to delay confronting long-term challenges. Foremost among these is the desire to appeal to voters who traditionally prioritize their immediate, local needs over lofty-sounding future

trends. However, these trends will greatly impact needs all the way down to the local level as they come to pass. Therefore, it is up to skilled lawmakers to convincingly illustrate the connection between future needs and present action when faced with hesitation or a lack of understanding among constituents.

Likewise, congressional staffers' use of foresight need not inherently be constricted by near-term considerations. While immediate political calculations may weigh on the day-to-day operations of the policymaking process, there is often an appetite among members of Congress to be a part of something bigger. Staffers can seize upon this desire to help their bosses create policy that forges their legacy—something that appeals to all politicians. Moreover, staffers themselves can benefit from long-term thinking that often demonstrates a willingness to cooperate outside of traditional political camps.

Implementing foresight as a lawmaker or staffer is not always easy and may sometimes require a certain amount of willpower to overlook immediate political calculations. In the end, politics are always changing, but the facts and issues weighing on international security will remain until sufficient action is taken. What is critical to those interested in implementing foresight is to work within the system beholden to the electoral cycle to build both the institutional knowledge and proper messaging necessary to operationalize foresight in the day-to-day work of legislating.

Indeed, foresight need not conflict with that which dominates the news cycle. The key to foresight is not pitching seemingly irrelevant or trivial solutions to grand problems, but engaging and, at times, justifying the importance of long-term thinking. Fundamentally, foresight is just structured common sense about the future. After all, the only sure way to create lasting national prosperity is to pass legislation that prepares us for the greatest forthcoming challenges of our time.

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## Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to many colleagues whose contributions made the Congressional Foresight Initiative possible. We relied on **Christian Hyde**, **Habiba Ahmed**, **Colin McElhinny**, **Catherine Nzuki**, **Katherine Speece**, **Aman Tune**, and **Amanda Corrado** to bring both the initiative and this report to life.

The authors also extend special thanks to **Sam Brannen** and **Louie Lauter**, the founding codirectors of the Congressional Foresight Initiative.

This paper is made possible by support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

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