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U.S. FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Antonín Novotný – Adam Potočňák*

ABSTRACT

In an era of ongoing strategic confrontation between the world's major powers, the security and foreign policy of the United States, the still dominant global superpower, is also undergoing constant and turbulent changes personified particularly by the arrival of new presidential administrations. In this regard, the ascension of the administration of current President Joe Biden in January 2021 is another milestone for the analysis of U.S. security policy. The presented article thus analyses the foreign and security policy of the United States of America in the January 2021-January 2023 period, that is, in the first half of the Joe Biden administration's term. The authors use the foreign policy analysis method to critically analyse Biden's foreign and security policy in three distinctive geopolitical regions: the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East. The authors utilise Biden's policy in these regions as a case study to test Pavel Hlaváček's theory from 2018, according to which the national mood of the U.S. foreign currently finds itself in an introverted phase. The authors conclude that the theory remains valid by analysing Biden's foreign and security policy. Based on the 2022 midterm elections result, they also support Hlaváček's assumption that another alteration in the national mood in the U.S. foreign policy should not be expected sooner than in the mid-2030s. Nonetheless, the validity of the applied theory and the conclusions we have drawn from it will be conclusively tested by all upcoming presidential or midterm elections, with the nearest ones as early as November 2024.

Key words: Foreign Policy, Security Policy, USA, Joe Biden, Indo-Pacific, Europe, Middle East

INTRODUCTION

On Friday, 20 January 2023, two years have passed since **Joseph R. Biden**

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took office as the 46th President of the United States; at the age of 78, becoming the oldest person to ever ascend to the nation's highest executive office. During that time, **Joe Biden** was repeatedly criticised by the Republican opposition for his rhetorical missteps and literal stumbles, questioning his mental fitness to hold the presidency. This article desires to go beyond flattened headlines and simplified populist-laden perceptions pointing to Joe Biden's personality, through which American politics is sometimes superficially perceived and analysed. We aim to embed the first half of the Biden presidency in a solid theoretical framework and long-term contexts and use it as a case study to verify the existing theory about the nature of the U.S. foreign and security policy.

The new president and members of his administration¹ took office in a time of unprecedented socio-political polarization in the USA, augmented by repeated questioning of the rules-based international order and significant worldwide shifts in the balance of geopolitical power. Thirty years after the end of the Cold War, the USA and its allies face a new geopolitical challenge in economically and militarily enormously growing and increasingly assertive totalitarian China. Furthermore, they face revitalised Russian authoritarianism, imperialism, and historical revisionism in Europe while reducing engagements in the Middle East, a region that has consumed a critical portion of its strategic resources, time, attention, and energy over the past 20 years. The global security landscape is changing at an unparalleled pace, largely due to the U.S. foreign and security policy or global posture. Citing one of the theories on U.S. foreign policy, the past decade represents a transformational period. The American national mood, affected by generational changes - specifically the end of the Cold War and 20-yearlong engagements in the Middle East - once again reached an "introverted" phase, curbing its involvement overseas. This article examines how the first half of **Joe Biden's** presidency fits into this theoretical assumption.

Theory and Methodology

In his 2018 article, **Pavel Hlaváček** argues that the U.S. foreign policy has

¹ Throughout the article, President **Joe Biden**, a person holding the highest national executive office in the USA, personifies the entire administration governing the country since 20 January 2021. Considering the focus and scope of the article, the "**Joe Biden**" person and "the Biden administration" terms represent an entire group of crucial decision-makers, advisors, and executives participating together with the President in the creation and execution of the U.S. foreign and security policy - primarily Secretary of State **Anthony Blinken**, Secretary of Defense **Lloyd Austin III** and National Security Advisor **Jake Sullivan** with their respective staffs, offices, and departments.

altered its national mood from "extroversion" to "introversion". Major ramifications of that process encompass gradual U.S. withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan, limited military interventions in Libya and Syria, lukewarm reaction to Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, redistribution of American strategic assets to contain rising China in the Indo-Pacific and pondering U.S. foreign and security policy into a new, introvert era (Hlaváček, 2018). **Hlaváček** based his conclusions on a combination of two theories; one on the cyclical nature of the U.S. foreign policy (Klingberg, 1952, Klingberg, 1970, Klingberg, Holmes, 2014); and the other on the generationally triggered cyclical alternations of U.S. foreign policy national mood (Roskin, 1974). The first theory says that an "extrovert" mood of the U.S. foreign policy is based on *"a nation's willingness to bring its influence to bear upon other nations, to exert positive pressure (economic, diplomatic, or military) outside its borders"* while the "introvert" one is typical for *"unwillingness of the United States to exert much positive pressure upon other nations and a desire to concentrate on domestic concerns"* (Klingberg, 1952, cited by Hlaváček, 2018: 60). Roskin's theory then argues that *"each generation is created by its global opinion - conventional wisdom or paradigm - which is based on circumstances that it has experienced or knowledge it has acquired during adolescence"* (Roskin, 1974, cited by Hlaváček, 2018: 60). Simply put, if politicians from two different generations face a similar political or security problem, each of them would prefer a specific way to solve it - the extroverts would call for action, intervention, or pre-emption, while introverts would rather be defensive and transfer the burden of solution on others. Since the end of the 18th Century, the USA has experienced ten shifts in the national mood, with an introvert mood lasting 21 years on average and an extrovert mood averaging 27 years. The 2014-2018 period supposedly marked the last national mood shift so far, drifting the U. S. foreign policy to an introverted mood. **Hlaváček** concluded his article with an expectation that the current national mood will last at least until the mid-2030s, when a new generation of American leaders calling for greater involvement would emerge and most probably shift the pendulum back to extroversion (Hlaváček, 2018).²

Our theory-testing article follows Hlaváček's 2018 research with a particular time distance and aims to critically assess whether the current Biden administration qualifies for or dissents from the theory's conclusions. The article

² **George Friedman**, one of the most prominent and cited geopolitical thinkers of these times, has recently and independently drawn a similar conclusion (Friedman, 2021).

also strives to take a position on the general validity and applicability of Hlaváček's combined theory and transforms its research goals into two separate research questions:

- Does the Biden administration qualify as a continuation of the currently supposed “introvert” national mood of the U.S. foreign and security policy?
- Does empirical knowledge at the turn of 2022/2023 support the general validity of Hlaváček's combined theory on generational changes triggering cyclical alternations of the national mood in the U.S. foreign and security policy?

The article takes the form of a single case study that deals with a specific matter (the U.S. foreign and security policy) in a specific time (roughly the first half of the Biden administration's tenure, period of January 2021 – January 2023) and limited geographical scope (see below). The foreign policy analysis will analyse the empirical knowledge as an independent method oriented primarily on contextual understanding and interpretation of specific policies, analysing political motives or interests, and decision-making processes. It also enables researchers to conclusively evaluate outcomes generated by policies under scrutiny (Potter, 2010). The empirical analysis deals with Biden's foreign and security policy in the mentioned period, covering three specific geopolitical regions from which the most pressing security threats, risks and challenges against the U.S. derive - the Indo-Pacific region, Europe (including Russia), and the Middle East. The article then provides final answers to the research questions, concluding with a brief reflection on the possible impacts of the November 2022 midterm election results on Biden's foreign and security policy in the second half of his tenure.

Since the article deals with vivid and evolving matters, the source base for the analysis consists primarily of official state documents and strategies or speeches delivered by political leaders. These are supplemented by up-to-date analytical materials published by renowned governmental or non-governmental institutions or independent think tanks. If necessary, reports from respected media sources further complement the source base. The fact that the matter we have researched undergoes constant development poses a significant limitation of our research. So does its limited geographical and geopolitical scope we had to apply for the sake of clarity, a necessity to narrow down a researched subject, and due to the limited scope of the article. Further examinations of the current U.S. foreign and security policy in regions we had to omit (e. g. Latin America or Africa) represent an exciting and beneficial challenge, which we leave for our

academic fellows.

1. Trapped Between Cooperation and Competition in the Indo-Pacific

Having been involved in foreign and security policy for four decades as a U.S. Senator and Vice President, **Joe Biden** is perceived as a highly experienced politician who tends to rely on his instincts and experience while formulating policies and making decisions (O'Hanlon, 2022). Roughly six months before being elected president, he summarised his foreign and security policy priorities in a comprehensive article for the prestigious *Foreign Affairs* magazine (Biden, 2020). While the "*America First*" motto accompanied four years of the **Donald Trump** presidency, Biden's manifesto and his first presidential remarks always stressed the "*America is Back*" notion. Contrary to his predecessor, **Joe Biden** has always considered multilateralism the most suitable tool for the world, mired by a pacing great power competition (Biden, 2020, The White House, 2021a). For over a decade, his emphasis on multilateralism and cooperation prevailed, especially in the Indo-Pacific, the U.S. foreign and security policy's top priority region. Rapid economic growth incentivised the People's Republic of China (PRC, China) elites toward greater assertiveness, particularly after 2013, under President and Communist Party chairman **Xi Jinping**. PRC gradually rose to the position where it possesses sufficient military, economic, diplomatic, and technological tools to disrupt the current rules-based international order of which the U.S. is the creator and guarantor (Allison, 2018, Frankopan, 2018). The USA has long feared that Beijing will not be willing to preserve the U.S.-favoured status quo in East Asia and the Indo-Pacific region, dominated by the superior U.S. navy ever since the end of World War II. Instead, it embarked on a strategy to balance and contain growing Chinese assertiveness and ambitions. The Obama administration (2009-2017) first responded to the potential Chinese threat to the U. S. strategic and security interests with its "*pivot to Asia*" (Goldberg 2016). The Trump administration (2017-2021) later accelerated the transformation of U.S. - China relations into an outright strategic competition, mainly in trade, research, and technology development – ironically spheres, in which both sides remained the most interconnected and partially interdependent (Bown, Kolb, 2022).

The first hints of the official Biden's policy toward China were provided by Secretary of State **Anthony Blinken** in March 2021, highlighting relations with China as one of the eight top U.S. foreign policy priorities (U.S. DoS, 2021).

Despite personal and political differences with his Republican predecessor, Democrat **Joe Biden** did not roll back any sanctions or tariffs imposed on China by the previous administration. Contrarily, his cabinet continued the set strategic competition course, ending the first direct interaction with Chinese counterparts in March 2021 with an exchange of accusations and criticism (Toosi, 2021). Balancing and containing China remained the highest strategic goal, which **Biden** summoned his preferred multilateralism and cooperation with allies. In his pre-election manifesto, he stressed establishing closer relations with Japan, South Korea, Australia, India, and Indonesia (Biden, 2020). Thus, members of his administration conducted during the first two years of office several trips to East Asia, making sure the U.S. relations with these countries remained on the wished course (Hass, 2022). Originally Trump-initialised and Biden-continued revitalisation of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the QUAD, consisting of the USA, India, Japan, and Australia), the emergence of a new security pact comprising Australia, United Kingdom, and the USA (AUKUS, in September 2021)³ and establishing the Partners in the Blue Pacific Forum (PBP) in June 2022, all demonstrate American eagerness to reshape Indo-Pacific security architecture to enhance its ability to balance and contain Chinese ambitions.

Amidst the raging war in Ukraine, U.S. and Chinese diplomats sat down in March 2022 for the second round of direct bilateral talks on global security issues. Much like the previous summit in Alaska, the meeting in Rome, Italy, did not bring any concrete progress for the better. **Anthony Blinken**, thus, in another speech on U.S. foreign policy priorities in May 2022, reiterated that depending on the specific area, relations between Washington and Beijing would have to be simultaneously cooperative, competitive, and, if unavoidable, adversarial (U.S. DoS, 2022a). The Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2022, a convention of more than 600 experts, journalists, and politicians, also witnessed no amelioration of tensions (Hass, 2022); the U.S.-China relations thus kept moving in a dangerous spiral of mutual distrust. The animosity peaked during House of Representatives Speaker **Nancy Pelosi** and other lawmakers' visit to Taiwan in August 2022.⁴ In

³ Although the emergence of AUKUS temporarily put Biden's multilateralism into question as France felt ignored, humiliated, and stripped of a lucrative nuclear submarine deal with Australia and reacted bitterly to the creation of the pact (Belin, 2021).

⁴ Besides lasting historical, ideological, and geopolitical reasons for U.S.-China rivalry over Taiwan, technology now interferes with the issue more than ever. Both great powers almost entirely depend on the Taiwanese TSMC company's ability to produce more than 90% of the global production of top-notch semiconductors (Maizland, 2022).

response, Chinese naval and air forces conducted a series of demonstrative military drills around the beleaguered island (Singleton, 2022). Since **Joe Biden** had stated several times that should Taiwan find itself under military attack or an imminent threat from China, the USA would come to its aid; the late summer and early autumn of 2022 marked severe political escalation between Washington and Beijing.⁵ On top of that, the U.S. Congress approved in autumn 2022 a series of laws restricting the export of semiconductors, processors, software, chip-production equipment, and supercomputer components to China, striving to cut Beijing from the most advanced American technologies, slow down its technological development and contribute to economic decoupling and friend-shoring processes (Bateman, 2022, Iyengar, 2022).

At the same time, the long-awaited Biden's National Security Strategy (NSS) was finally published on 12 October 2022.⁶ Due to postponements caused by the war in Ukraine, it was released almost two years into the Biden presidency, relatively late by American standards. Consequently, more than a strategic outline, it resembled a summary of already conducted policies toward specific regions, actors, and issues. The document reaffirms American commitment to secure a "*free, open, secure and prosperous international order*" (The White House, 2022, p. 6) and concurring with an effort to cement existing and establish new partnerships in the Indo-Pacific, it urges the USA to honour its regional and local alliances so it could remain present all around the world diplomatically, economically, and militarily. On PRC, the NSS follows Secretary Blinken's words, restating American willingness to avoid direct military conflict or establish Cold War-style relations with Beijing. The document lists global threats, risks, and challenges requiring active U.S.-China cooperation⁷ but also labels China as a "*pace challenge*" (The White House, 2022, p. 12) and permeates Biden's perception of the current world as an outset of a struggle between democracies and authoritarian-revisionist dictatorships. Tellingly, the 48-page long document

⁵ Every time President Biden spoke about American defence commitment to Taiwan, his staff corrected his words, assuring Beijing of American commitment to the "one-China policy" and reiterating U.S. strategic ambiguity on Taiwanese defence issues. However, having stressed U.S. commitments to Taiwan at least four times in 2021 and 2022 indicate that American strategy toward Taiwan underwent significant adjustments in favour of greater American involvement in the island's defence (Kine, 2022).

⁶ Releasing of lower-level sectoral strategies, National Defense Strategy, Nuclear Posture Review and Missile Defense Review, followed soon afterwards, on 28 October 2022.

⁷ Those threats, risks, and challenges comprise climate change, energy crisis, pandemics, food security, non-proliferation, or struggle against global terrorism and international organized crime (The White House, 2022).

contains 83 references to the word "competition" or its derivatives (e. g. "competitive"), mainly referring to China or Russia.

The U.S.-Chinese relations finally saw a partial easing of tensions in November, after the first face-to-face talks between Presidents **Biden** and **Xi Jinping** at the side-lines of the G20 summit on the Indonesian island of Bali. The two leaders reiterated their respective positions on Taiwan and reassured each other that they do not seek direct military conflict. They also agreed on resuming cooperation on climate change, debt relief, public health, and global food security - thus many issues enumerated in Biden's 2022 NSS - demonstrating a mutual willingness to prevent ongoing competition from transforming into an outright conflict (Sacks, 2022). During the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting in Cambodia, a meeting between the U.S. Secretary of Defense, **Lloyd Austin**, and Chinese national defence minister, **Wei Fenghe**, took place, reportedly in a constructive atmosphere. Countries also agreed on Secretary Anthony Blinken's first official state visit to Beijing at the beginning of 2023 (Dress, 2022, Wong, 2022).

Unfortunately for the USA, apart from rising China, the Biden administration faced another imminent security issue in the Far East - missile tests conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea). The North Korean regime conducted more than 60 firing tests of various ballistic and cruise missiles in 2022, mainly in the autumn, when it also completed all preparations for its seventh nuclear test. Biden's White House warned Pyongyang against painful consequences if it tests its nuclear warhead, simultaneously increasing the frequency and scope of joint military exercises with Japan and South Korea. Consequently, tensions in the Far East have reached the highest level since the war of words between **Donald Trump** and **Kim Jong-un** in 2017 (Shinkman, 2022). At the G20 summit in Bali, President Biden tried to persuade President **Xi Jinping** to use China's leverage against the DPRK, so far, to no avail. He also warned his interlocutor that should Beijing fail to bring North Korea to the fold, the USA would have to eventually beef up its military presence in the region (Davenport, 2022). At the end of 2022, there was no indication that the DPRK intended to end or suspend its tests; East Asia thus most probably remains on the list of the world's most volatile and conflicted regions. The same applies to Eastern Europe, where the Biden administration had to deal with the most acute security threat it has ever faced.

2. Facing the Most Acute Threat in Europe

In line with Biden's manifesto, a "damage control" and reparation of friendly relations in Europe shattered by four years of Trump's political unilateralism and economic protectionism became top priorities since the early days of the new administration. As a president, **Joe Biden** first conveyed to Europe that "America is back" in his February 2021 Virtual Munich Security Conference speech (The White House, 2021b). He materialised the message during his June trip to the United Kingdom for a G7 summit and Belgium for a NATO summit and a U.S.-EU summit (Afzal, De Maio, Goldgeier et al., 2021). Besides reassuring European allies on the U.S. commitments to their defence and security, it was allegedly during Biden's visit to the United Kingdom that future AUKUS creation got its decisive traction. Against all odds, it was not damaged American credibility in Europe, but Russia, who eventually created Biden's main predicament in Europe. Both as a candidate and then as a president, Joe Biden has long rejected any form of another "strategic reset" with Russia, a sort of policy he experienced first-hand in 2009-2012 as Barack Obama's vice president (Stent, 2015). Nevertheless, his administration was interested in having a "*stable and predictable way forward with Russia*" (Woodward, Costa, 2021, p. 401), resulting in Biden's successful initiative for a 5-year extension of the New START, U.S.-Russia nuclear arms reduction treaty, just upon taking office (Reif, Bugos, 2021). Even though **Biden** later agreed with **Vladimir Putin** being described as a "*killer*" (Crane, 2021), both presidents eventually met at the bilateral summit in Geneva. A two-hour long talk resulted in a joint statement reinstating the principal inadmissibility of nuclear war and laying the substantive ground for future arms control, cyber-security, and risk reduction measures (Kumar, Forgey, 2021)

At the turn of 2021/2022, the USA agreed on bilateral U.S.-Russia and NATO-Russia negotiations amidst rising tensions around Ukraine; but unprecedented and grossly exaggerated Russia's demands for the actual rollback of NATO from central and Eastern Europe eventually doomed the talks to failure (Pifer, 2022). Ultimately, Vladimir Putin's unprovoked and ill-conceived war of choice against Ukraine ruined any chance for stability and predictability in relations with the USA for years to come. The White House immediately spearheaded sanction regimes against Russia and limited all its formal contacts with the Kremlin. Instead of building stability and predictability, it has focused on dissuading Putin's regime from using nuclear weapons against Ukraine, negotiating detained citizens' swaps, and conditioning any future constructive talks on Russia's complete

withdrawal from Ukraine (Crowley, Shear, 2022). Moreover, after Russian troops failed to capture Kyiv and had to retreat from northern Ukraine, the strategic weakening of Russia's military potential became a priority for Biden's administration (Borger, 2022). At the end of 2022, the USA has been the most significant contributor to Ukrainian defence, comprehensively supporting Kyiv for ten months and gradually increasing both quantitative and qualitative levels of its military, civil and humanitarian assistance (U.S. DoS, 2022b). So far, the approach has paid off politically and militarily for **Joe Biden**. Most Americans still approve the large-scale assistance to Ukraine short of direct military involvement (Kagan, Polyak, 2022, Smeltz, Daalder, Friedhoff et al., 2022); while American aid to Ukraine succeeded in crippling at least half of Russia's conventional forces at friction of annual U.S. defence budget.⁸ On the other hand, the USA now faces a challenge to urgently refill its dwindling ammunition stocks and restore defence and ammunition production capacities. In May 2022, the U.S. Congress approved mobilising its military-industrial complex's capacities, and President **Biden** signed the "Ukraine Democracy Defense Lend-Lease Act of 2022" (effective from 1 January 2023). An actual revision of the World War II act now authorises the administration not only to lend or lease U. S. military equipment to Ukraine (or any other Eastern European country) but also lifts several legal and political obstacles for doing so (Vergun, 2022).⁹

The war also served the Biden administration as a welcomed refresh for NATO's *raison d'être* - collective defence and deterrence - reinvigorating critically important trans-Atlantic political and military ties. The NATO 2022 Madrid Summit succeeded in adopting a long-awaited new Strategic Concept of the Alliance, which designates Russia as "*the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area*" (NATO, 2022, p. 4).¹⁰

⁸ Since the outbreak of the war, the Biden administration sent Ukraine military aid worth more than \$19bn, added to some \$20bn of aid the White House had already provided in the pre-war period of January 2021 – February 2022 (Ash, 2022).

⁹ The need for restoring American weapons, vehicles and ammunition production later also addressed Biden's National Defense Strategy (U.S. DoD, 2022). Nonetheless, the administration later earned some criticism for devoting too many resources to research and development instead of procurement and maintenance (Eaglen, 2022).

¹⁰ The 2022 Strategic Concept also addresses China whose "*malicious hybrid and cyber operations, confrontational rhetoric and disinformation target Allies and harm Alliance security*" (NATO, 2022, p. 5), much to the delight of Washington and representatives from Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea who also attended the NATO 2022 Summit. Governments of these countries had already joined the USA and the EU in sanctioning Russia, contributing to the gradual emergence of a nascent

NATO's refurbished vitality and unity are also acknowledged in the NSS 2022, reiterating the Alliance's duties as a cornerstone of European security architecture, welcoming Swedish and Finnish bids for NATO membership and marking Russia as an immediate threat to the U.S. security interests (The White House, 2022).

3. Continued Reshaping of the Middle East

Regarding the Middle East, Biden's 2022 National Security Strategy continues with an established trend to downplay the region's security dynamics within the U.S. strategic priorities. The issue is reflected primarily through the acknowledgement that military and regime-change policies of previous administrations have failed, thus prompting the current administration to interact with the decisive local actors diplomatically and to prefer conflict mediation and stabilization to forced democratization (The White House, 2022). Among the most pressing regional issues, deterring Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons remains at the top of Biden's agenda. While serving as Barack Obama's vice president, Joe Biden largely contributed to sealing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) that curbed the Iranian nuclear program in exchange for lifting some Western and American sanctions against the theocratic regime in Tehran. However, the treaty did not win sufficient support in the U.S. Congress and was adopted only by the presidential executive order, from which the Trump administration withdrew in May 2018. No wonder the return to the agreement became one of Biden's Middle East policy priorities. Starting in April 2021, American and Iranian diplomats convened in Vienna for several rounds of bilateral talks. However, negotiations got stuck after May 2022, when the U.S. Congress approved a non-binding proposal that any future deal with Tehran should address not only Iranian nuclear program but also its ballistic missile development program. A bipartisan Senate majority also requested a formal Iranian pledge to stop sponsoring terrorism while supposing that sanctions against the elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corpses (IRGC), designed by the U.S. authorities as a foreign terrorist organization, would remain intact (Desiderio, 2022). Tehran vehemently opposes such a move, insists on restoring the original JCPOA without any amendments, and requires removing IRGC from the U.S. list of terrorist organizations. As of December 2022, all Vienna talks ended up in a

Atlantic-Pacific security and economic axis centred around the USA (Rasmussen, Stent, Walt et al., 2022).

stalemate.

Besides Iran, Americans got stuck in an impasse also with Saudi Arabia. As a presidential candidate, **Joe Biden** starkly condemned the 2018 murder of **Jamal Khashoggi** in Istanbul (allegedly conducted by Saudi secret services), advocated against the U.S. support for the Saudis war in Yemen and shunned Saudi de facto leader, crown prince **Mohammed bin Salman**. On the other hand, Saudis and other Persian Gulf monarchies like Kuwait, Qatar, and United Arab Emirates (UAE) opposed U.S. efforts to restore the Iran nuclear deal, fearing Washington would be too willing to make concessions to Tehran. In July 2022, amidst continuing war in Ukraine, **President Biden** visited Israel, Saudi Arabia, and UAE, convening with the Saudi monarchs and several other leaders of the Middle East countries. Having backtracked on his previous critical remarks, **Joe Biden** tried to persuade them to increase the overall oil production of their respective countries. In doing so, he sought two goals – decreasing global market prices and striking further blows to Russia’s staggering economy. Contrary to the U.S. wishes, the OPEC+ cartel, of which Russia is a member, announced a worldwide reduction of oil production by 2 million barrels per day in October. The move might mark a significant turning point in U.S.-Saudi relations as many Democratic and Republican lawmakers are calling for re-evaluating U.S.-Saudi relations and adopting retaliatory measures against Riyadh. The suggestions embrace cutting U.S. weapons sales to the monarchy or withdrawing U.S. forces from there (Fontenrose, 2022, Miller, 2022b). Against the backdrop of the recently signed comprehensive partnership agreement between China and Saudi Arabia (El-Khazen, 2022), the future of U.S.-Saudi relations remains at the knife’s edge.

As a Vice President to **Barack Obama** and later as a presidential candidate, **Joe Biden** opposed troop surges in Afghanistan and advocated for the definitive termination of an “infinite” American military engagement (Biden, 2020, Woodward, Costa, 2021). In April 2021, after reviewing the Afghanistan strategy at a total of 25 National Security Council meetings, with the amount of U.S. troops there dropped to 3500 troops, **President Biden** decided on a complete withdrawal of all American forces from Afghanistan no later than 31 August - three months later than the agreement between the Trump administration and Taliban initially presupposed (The White House, 2021c, Woodward, Costa, 2021). Eventually, the USA and its allies managed to airlift more than 120 000 people from the country within a couple of weeks (The White House, 2021c). However, the operation was ill-prepared, poorly organized, and haphazard, conducted while the Taliban was gaining control over the vast chunks of Afghan territory and

encountering almost no resistance (The White House 2023, U. S. DoD, 2023). To make matters worse, a suicidal terrorist attack at Kabul airport on 26 August killed more than 170 Afghani civilians and 13 U.S. troops (Seyler, 2022). The way Washington put its allies before a *fait accompli* in Afghanistan gave rise to a legitimate and critical debate about the effectiveness and sincerity of Biden-proclaimed multilateralism. The withdrawal from Afghanistan also triggered an instant and, up to that point, the most significant downfall in Biden's popularity and approval rates (Montanaro, 2021). However, in July 2022, almost one year after leaving Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda leader **Ayman al-Zawahiri** was killed by the U.S. special forces. The White House thus proved its ability to strike the global terrorist networks decisively, even without "boots on the ground" in critical areas (Miller, 2022a).

Apart from hostile Iran, volatile Saudi Arabia, abandoned Afghanistan, and already scaled-down American engagement in Iraq and Syria, the Middle East region also hosts one of the most prominent U.S. allies in the world – Israel. The Biden administration initially intended to encourage the coalition governments led by **Naftali Bennett** and **Yair Lapid** to soothe relations with more neighbours - so that more Arab countries join the Trump-negotiated Abraham Accords - and work on the two-state solution with Palestine (Ryan, 2022, The White House, 2022). However, with former prime minister **Benjamin Netanyahu** returning to power after November 2022 early elections, the future shape of the U.S.–Israeli strategic partnership remains unclear. Popular but also sharply polarising and corruption-accused "Bibi", currently supported by Israeli far-right ultra-nationalists, made previously no secret of his sympathies towards the Republican Party and former president **Donald Trump**. Biden's administration thus faces the challenge of finding a *modus operandi* **Joe Biden** with a critically important ally and a constituent of a regional deterrence against Iran (Lord, 2022).

Final Assessment and Prospects after the Midterm Elections

Joe Biden epitomises two generations of Americans whose foreign policy experience was formed mainly by the triumph in the Cold War and then by strategic defeats suffered in the Middle East. According to **Hlaváček** (2018), both events determined the recent shift of the national mood to introversion, with the current U.S. foreign and security policies in all three examined regions confirming the trend. The Biden administration is aware of a formidable Chinese strategic competitor in the Indo-Pacific and strives to balance and contain it; nonetheless, its strategy is rather defensive in nature. First, it passes the buck of balance and

containment mainly on emerging U.S.-centred allied structures like QUAD, AUKUS or PBP; second, it opts for trade and technology to be the areas of an active confrontation. The mutual tendency not to antagonise relations beyond a manageable risk has been a noticeable feature of U.S.-China relations under the Biden administration. Moreover, the current American top-level strategic documents and multiple remarks made by top administration officials, including the president himself, stress the importance of Chinese co-commitment to resolve pressing global crises and wicked problems like climate change, pandemics, or energy crises. These developments signal Biden's understandable reservations, unwillingness to confront China on a full-scale basis and endeavour to keep the back door open for possible cooperation on specific issues. A similar principle applies to Europe, where Biden's administration faces Vladimir Putin's imperial revisionism and military aggression in Ukraine. The diplomatic ties with Russia are in ruins as the USA leads an international coalition backing Ukraine and gradually enhancing its military and non-military assistance to Kyiv. On the other hand, the White House rarely misses a chance to stress that American (or NATO) military force will not take part in the conflict unless an extraordinary and unparalleled event (e. g. Russia's use of nuclear weapons) forces it to do so. Simultaneously, **President Biden** follows his predecessors' **Trump** and **Obama**, with diplomatic pressure on Europe NATO allies to take a more proactive approach to ensuring their defence and security. Despite the temporarily increased American military presence in Europe just after Russia invaded Ukraine, **Joe Biden** realises that strategic American assets and resources are increasingly needed in the Indo-Pacific. Thus, from the strategic perspective, curbing its engagements in Europe and other regions seems imminent, contributing to the overall introverted nature of the current U.S. foreign and security policy. Finally, probably nothing mirrors the introverted nature of Biden's foreign and security policy better than his decision to withdraw U.S. forces from Afghanistan completely and downplay the importance of the entire Middle East in the strategic documents. Terminating the U.S. longest-ever overseas military engagement underscores the end of a transformational period from an extrovert to an introverted national mood that started in 2014.

A variable that always significantly intervenes in U.S. foreign and domestic politics is the current balance of power in the U.S. Congress. In this regard, the November 2022 midterm elections were one of the crucial determinants to predispose Biden's foreign and security policy in the second half of his presidency, January 2023 - January 2025. Based on his popularity and approval

ratings from autumn 2022, the midterms were expected to confirm the American electoral tradition of the governing party losing seats both in the Senate and the House of Representatives. However, election results proved correct for those observers who predicted that the 2022 midterms could be an exception to the rule (Jacobson, 2022).¹¹ Following the pre-election predictions, the Republicans took the House of Representatives, however, with a much smaller margin (222 to 213 seats) than expected. In the Senate, the Democratic party even won one more seat (holding 51 seats in total) after its candidate succeeded in the December runoff election in Georgia. Despite losing its minimal majority in the House of Representatives, the results are good news for Biden's policies in general, including foreign and security issues. The centre-oriented Democrats and Republicans in both chambers of the U.S. Congress are expected to preserve existing bipartisan consensus on crucial foreign policy issues (Ashford, Kroenig, 2022) and eliminate dissenting radical left-leaning wing of the Democratic party (Ward, Berg, 2022) as well as far-right conspiracy elements within the Republican party (Porter, 2022). There is a low probability that Biden's foreign and security policy will be significantly altered due to election results. Therefore, low chances remain for an abrupt shift away from the prevailing introverted national mood in the U.S. foreign and security policy.

The concluding answer to our two research questions thus states that Biden's foreign and security policy so far fits into the framework of an introverted national mood conceptualised in Hlaváček's article and that our article does not falsify the general validity of his theory. Moreover, recent midterm election results do not signal any assumptions that empirical reality would weaken the theory's validity anytime soon. As a result, Hlaváček's and Friedman's predictions for the introvert national mood to last until the mid-2030s seem safe, at least for the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

History teaches us that unpredictable and uncontrollable geopolitical developments affect nations' strategies more than specific leaders, who usually

¹¹ Just before the midterms, Joe Biden enjoyed a very low approval rate of 41%, with up to 53% of Americans disagreeing with his policies (Five Thirty Eight, 2022). As expected, skyrocketing inflation and rising prices dominated the election campaign, followed by issues like education, healthcare, criminality, or cultural preferences and values (Schaeffer, van Green, 2022). Foreign policy traditionally played a less important role, partially thanks to a strong bipartisan agreement in the U.S. Congress on a confrontational approach to China and Russia (Ferguson, 2022).

exert limited power to navigate their nations' policies. The principle also applies to the U.S. foreign and security policy, making Biden's presidency no exception. We conclude that with **Joe Biden**, the U.S. national mood completes its transformation into an introverted phase, having finished the process that began during **Barack Obama's** second term and continued under **Donald Trump**.

Joe Biden still has the other half of his term left. If he were to run for re-election in 2024 and succeed, he would be 86 at the end of his eventual second term. Nevertheless, it would not change the fact that his generation of politicians was decisively affected by the results of the Cold War, followed by 20 years of American engagements in the Middle East conflicts. Extrapolating Biden's foreign and security policy practice and assuming no intervention of the proverbial "black swan" occurs, we join **Pavel Hlaváček** and **George Friedman** in assuming nothing substantial will alternate the introverted national mood of the current USA sooner than in the mid-2030s. At that time, it will probably happen under the new generation of U.S. politicians, whose formation is taking place right now – reflecting 20 years of American engagements in the Middle East and the experience of the ongoing globally turbulent 2020s. In this regard, the Biden administration's foreign and security policy has already been one of the forming elements of future-generation U.S. leaders' strategic thinking.

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