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AN ANALYTICAL OVERVIEW OF TRUMP AND HARRIS'S FOREIGN POLICY



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In this issue:

- An Analytical Overview of Trump and Harris's Foreign Policy 3
- Afghanistan 4
- Middle East..... 5
- The Russia-Ukraine War 8
- China..... 9
- Conclusion 10
- Recommendations 10
- References..... 10

Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS)



AN ANALYTICAL OVERVIEW OF TRUMP AND HARRIS'S FOREIGN POLICY

Introduction

The U.S. presidential election is set for Tuesday, November 5, 2024, with the victorious candidate assuming office in January 2025. In the United States, the president is elected through the Electoral College system, which comprises 538 votes. ¹ A candidate must secure 270 of these votes to be declared the winner.²

Although the U.S. electoral process is complex and warrants a separate discussion, we'll provide a brief overview. Each state has a set number of electors, and during the election, electors for each candidate are chosen based on the candidate's political party. When the public casts their vote for president and vice president, they effectively vote for their state's electors.

In most states, the candidate who receives the majority of the state's popular vote is declared the winner of that state, and all electors from that state are assigned to that candidate's group. This system is known as "winner-take-all." After the election, electors from all states convene, forming the Electoral College, and formally cast their votes for the candidates. When a candidate reaches 270 electoral votes, they are declared the winner.³

Once the successful candidate takes the oath of office in January, they formally present their foreign policy. Even during campaign rallies, candidates highlight key aspects of their foreign policy. This article aims to analyze these foreign policy aspects. According to Joseph Frankel, foreign policy encompasses the decisions and actions of one government with another.⁴

When making foreign policy decisions, various factors come into play, which are typically divided into two main categories: external and internal factors. Among the internal factors, one key influence is the personality and disposition of a nation's leader or president, which can significantly shape foreign policy. Based on one categorization, leaders are divided into two main types:

1. **Hawkish Leaders:** These leaders tend to have a serious, assertive nature. They are easily provoked and execute decisions with a high level of intensity. The foreign policy of hawkish leaders often reflects an aggressive stance. Examples of such leaders include Hitler, Mussolini, George W. Bush, Donald Trump, and others.
2. **Dovish Leaders:** In contrast, these leaders possess a calm and measured personality. Their approach to foreign policy is often more conservative. Examples include Barack Obama, Emmanuel Macron, Joe Biden, and Xi Jinping.⁵

With this classification in mind, it is commonly observed that Democratic leaders often align with the "dove" category, as seen with Barack Obama, Joe Biden, and Bill Clinton. Conversely, Republican leaders, such as George Bush, George W. Bush, and Donald Trump, tend to be more hawkish.

Kamala Harris was born on October 20, 1964, in the United States to an Indian immigrant mother. Harris studied law and, in 2003, became the District Attorney of San Francisco. In 2010, she made history as the first woman elected Attorney General of California. In 2016, she was elected to the U.S. Senate from California, and in January 2021, she took the oath as the first female Vice President of the



United States. Currently a presidential candidate, Harris stands to make history again as the first female president of the United States if she wins this election.⁶

Donald Trump was born on June 14, 1946, in New York and graduated with a degree in economics from the University of Pennsylvania. Trump began his business career at his father's real estate company. Later, he expanded his career through ventures in the Trump Hotels, Plaza, and construction projects, ultimately joining the ranks of America's billionaires. In the 2016 election, he defeated Hillary Clinton and became the first billionaire president of the United States.⁷

In this analytical study, we will compare the foreign policies of Trump and Kamala Harris with Afghanistan, the Middle East, the Russia-Ukraine war, and China.

AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan does not appear to be a prominent focus in the future foreign policies of either Donald Trump or Kamala Harris. In the debates and discussions, they have engaged in so far, neither has outlined a clear stance on Afghanistan or indicated how they would approach relations with the Islamic Emirate government there. They have not addressed whether they would take a cooperative or confrontational path, nor have they clarified if they would continue America's current policy.⁸

In their debates, Afghanistan has mostly served as a point of criticism between the two candidates. Both Trump and Harris agree that the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan was poorly executed and a significant loss for the United States. Trump blames this failure on the Biden administration and Kamala Harris, asserting that their handling of the withdrawal was flawed and directly led to the deaths of 13 American soldiers,⁹ which he argues has marred America's reputation.

Harris, on the other hand, contends that the decision to withdraw was actually made during Trump's administration. She points out that Trump invited the Taliban to Camp David, held final negotiations with them, and ultimately signed the Doha Agreement, which included the withdrawal of American troops. She argues that her administration simply implemented the agreement reached between Trump and the Taliban.

Despite the lack of a specific foreign policy direction for Afghanistan from either candidate, experts believe that if comes to power, there will likely be no major shift in the U.S. approach to Afghanistan. It is expected that the U.S. will continue its stance of condemning the Islamic Emirate over issues like human rights abuses, connections to international terrorist organizations, and failure to establish¹⁰ an inclusive government. Pressure on these matters will likely persist.

At the same time, the U.S. might continue to engage diplomatically through meetings like the Doha discussions, to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a hub for terrorist activities and to discourage the country from falling fully into the influence of regional powers such as China and Russia.

In essence, fully resolving Afghanistan's issues may require more than a single U.S. presidential term. American foreign policy holds that the Islamic Emirate should establish a legitimate government through elections, provide educational and employment opportunities for women, take concrete steps to dismantle terrorist groups, and prevent terrorist activities within Afghanistan's borders. Additionally, the U.S. expects Afghanistan to address concerns about China and Russia and may leverage international institutions with a substantial presence in Afghanistan to meet these goals.



Achieving such objectives likely requires not only another presidential term but perhaps even longer, as the Islamic Emirate shows little readiness to comply with many of these conditions.

MIDDLE EAST

The Middle East is one of the critical topics in the foreign policy discussions of both Trump and Kamala Harris during their campaigns. Their respective approaches to this region, particularly regarding Israel-Palestine, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Turkey, are markedly distinct. Below is a breakdown of each candidate’s stance on these issues:

Kamala Harris	Donald Trump
- Supports a two-state solution.	- Holds a harder stance on Palestine, especially toward Hamas, compared to Harris.
- Condemns the killing of civilians in Gaza but recognizes Israel’s right to defend itself.	- Stated that if he were president, the October 7 attack would have never happened.
- Says, “Our administration will provide Israel with every resource to defend itself, especially against Iran and its proxies.”	- Claims that no president has defended Israel and American Jews as much as he has.
- States, “Ending the war is our priority, and we will strive to sign a ceasefire as soon as possible.” She also shared her post-war plan for Gaza in three parts:	- When asked about forming a Palestinian state, he responded, “We’ll see!” suggesting he does not support a two-state solution as Harris does.
- A) Reconstruction of Gaza	- Associates close to Trump, like his son-in-law and former ambassador Richard Grenell, have suggested that Gaza’s residents be moved to Egypt or southern Israel.
- B) Transferring Gaza’s security to the Palestinian Authority, led by Mahmoud Abbas (excluding Hamas).	- In July 2024, Trump told Netanyahu: “Do whatever you can to end this war.”
- C) Governance in Gaza should be under the Palestinian Authority.	- In 2018, he moved the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.
	- In 2018, he officially recognized Israel’s sovereignty over the Golan Heights.
	- In 2018, he cut U.S. funding to international organizations aiding Palestinian refugees.

In reviewing the above comparison, two main points stand out. First, both candidates, as well as the U.S. government in general, support and defend Israel (the reasons for this stance are specific and beyond the scope of this analysis). Second, while both support Israel, Trump’s position is notably tougher than Harris’s. Should Trump return to power, these issues will likely become even more complex.

Iran

Kamala Harris	Donald Trump
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Harris supports the nuclear sanctions agreement with Iran and is now working to revive it.	Trump’s foreign policy towards Iran is stringent.
She has described Trump’s withdrawal from the agreement as unwise and a threat to U.S. national security.	Trump withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) that Obama signed with Iran during his first term.
Harris opposes Iran’s stance on human rights and has stated she will work to support human rights within Iran.	Trump has outlined his foreign policy toward Iran as follows:
Harris’s foreign policy toward Iran seems likely to align closely with Joe Biden’s current policy, continuing sanctions on Iran, especially targeting its oil exports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A) Preventing Iran from accessing nuclear technology. - B) Continuing sanctions. - C) Providing security assistance to Iran’s opposition and U.S. allies in the region. - D) Supporting Iranian revolutionaries against the ruling clerics. - E) Securing the release of foreign hostages, especially U.S. citizens. - F) Preventing Iranian cyber-attacks on the U.S. and its allies.
	Trump claims that severe sanctions were imposed on Iran during his term, which Biden later relaxed, enabling Iran to amass \$300 billion that he alleges is being used to fund proxy groups across the Middle East.
	Trump has also expressed his intent to pressure China to halt its purchase of Iranian oil.

From this comparison, it’s clear that Trump’s stance on Iran is significantly tougher than Harris's. If Trump returns to office, his approach to Iran could likely pose further challenges for the regime.

Saudi Arabia

Kamala Harris	Donald Trump
In 2018, while serving in the Senate, Harris signed a bill limiting U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia due to the country's involvement in Yemen's civil war and the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.	Trump aims to facilitate a normalization agreement between Saudi Arabia and Israel.
In 2019, Harris called for a reassessment of U.S.-Saudi relations to align them more closely with American values and national interests, indicating a desire for less intimacy in the relationship.	Trump’s son-in-law has close business ties with the Saudi government, and Trump is expected to strengthen ties with Saudi Arabia.



<p>Under Biden’s administration, there have been restrictions on U.S. LNG exports to the Middle East, which has threatened Saudi companies like Aramco. Harris seems likely to continue this policy.</p>	<p>Trump plans to lift all restrictions on U.S. LNG exports, putting Saudi companies at a competitive threat.</p>
	<p>Trump maintained close relations with Saudi Arabia during his last term, largely driven by his hard stance on Iran, a relationship that may grow closer if he wins again in both political and economic spheres.</p>

In comparing the two candidates, Trump’s approach reflects a desire for closer ties with Saudi Arabia, while Harris appears inclined to keep relations limited within the bounds of U.S. interests.¹¹

Turkey

Kamala Harris	Donald Trump
<p>Harris is unlikely to raise human rights concerns in Turkey. However, U.S.-Turkey bilateral relations will continue to face strategic challenges.</p>	<p>Trump also will not focus on human rights issues.</p>
<p>Harris intends to withdraw U.S. troops from Iraq, which could affect security in both Syria and Iraq and, if instability arises, could also impact Turkish security.</p>	<p>Trump supports U.S. troop withdrawal from Iraq, which would similarly create security concerns for Turkey.</p>
<p>Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was expected to meet with Harris at the U.N. General Assembly in New York but declined, an action that may affect bilateral relations if Harris wins.</p>	<p>Trump’s strong support for Israel and Erdogan’s support for Palestine is expected to strain U.S.-Turkey relations.</p>
	<p>Trump’s stringent policies toward Iran, including severe sanctions, are likely to affect U.S.-Turkey relations, as they impact Iran-Turkey trade and energy relations.</p>
	<p>Trump previously took such measures, which caused economic challenges for Turkey and heightened difficulties for Erdogan.</p>

Both Harris and Trump consider the Houthis in Yemen to be a terrorist group. However, Harris opposes U.S. support for Saudi military operations in Yemen, while Trump supports such U.S.-backed operations.

Syria: Harris’s policy involves keeping U.S. forces in Syria to counter ISIS, address U.S. security threats, Provide humanitarian assistance, and support justice and diplomatic efforts. In contrast, Trump’s stance is to withdraw U.S. troops from these “endless wars”; he stated during his last term that he would remove troops from Syria, and it is anticipated that he will continue this policy if re-elected.

Iraq: Harris will likely follow Biden’s current policy. Biden signed a bilateral agreement with Iraq’s government, under which U.S. forces will depart Iraq in two phases: Phase One in September 2025 and Phase Two by late 2026. Trump also supports a reduction of U.S. forces in Iraq.¹²

THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

This war is another significant topic that constitutes a major part of the debate and the foreign policies of Harris and Trump.

Kamala Harris	Donald Trump
Harris supports Ukraine in the war with Russia. The current administration has provided \$55.7 billion in security aid and \$175 billion in economic support to Ukraine, and Harris states that these contributions will continue.	Trump claims that if he were president, Russia would never have invaded Ukraine.
Harris asserts that the U.S. will not interfere in Ukraine’s peace negotiations with Russia, as this decision lies solely with Ukraine.	Trump says he would end the war within 24 hours if elected president.
Harris affirms that her administration will not permit Ukraine to launch direct attacks on Russia, as this could lead to direct conflict between the U.S. and Russia.	Trump vows to establish a peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine to bring an end to the conflict.
U.S. economic sanctions on Russia, particularly in the technology and energy sectors, will persist.	Trump pledges to lift all sanctions imposed on Russia as part of a peace agreement between Ukraine and Russia.
NATO has become stronger and more united due to the Ukraine conflict, and her administration sees the strengthening of this alliance as a benefit of the war.	Trump heavily criticizes Biden for sending billions of dollars in aid to Ukraine, arguing that if he becomes president, he will halt all aid. Instead, if any assistance is provided, it will be in the form of a loan that Ukraine must repay.
	Trump’s running mate, Vince, holds an even more stringent stance against Ukraine, arguing that aid to Ukraine should cease as soon as possible to prompt peace negotiations. After peace talks, Ukraine should be declared a permanently neutral country and should not join NATO, aligning with Putin’s demands.

From the above policies on the Russia-Ukraine war, it can be deduced that a Trump victory would ¹³ be favorable to Russia, whereas a Harris victory would signify stronger support for Ukraine.

CHINA

The United States and China are two of the world's largest economic and military powers. According to 2023 data, these two countries together account for 43% of the global economy and 49% of military and defense expenditures.¹⁴

During his first term, Trump initiated a trade war with China. From 2018 to August 2020, he increased tariffs on Chinese goods from 10% to 25%. This tariff hike added \$80 billion in taxes on American consumers. The gross domestic product (GDP) of the United States decreased by 0.2%, and nearly 142,000 Americans lost their jobs. Trump now claims in his campaign that if he returns to power, he will increase tariffs on Chinese goods by 60%. If implemented, this tariff would increase annual taxes¹⁵ on American citizens by \$524 billion, reduce the U.S. GDP by 0.8%, and result in nearly 684,000 Americans losing their jobs.¹⁶

In addition to these sanctions, Trump also targeted Chinese tech companies, particularly Huawei, imposing restrictions and urging countries with close diplomatic ties to the U.S. to adopt similar measures. Furthermore, during his first term, Trump maintained close relations with Taiwan, increasing arms sales and having U.S. naval forces pass through the Taiwan Strait multiple times to exert pressure on China.

Trump also used the COVID-19 pandemic as a tool of pressure. He criticized China for not providing transparent information about the virus, which he claimed caused a human and economic disaster for which China should be held accountable. If Trump returns to power, his foreign policy towards China will likely include the following:

- Resuming the trade war with China.
- Defending Taiwan and using the island as leverage against China.
- Criticizing China for human rights violations, especially in Xinjiang.¹⁷
- Trump asserts that to protect American interests, China must be subjected to severe pressure.
- He also states that his policy aims to eliminate U.S. dependence on Chinese goods.¹⁸

Trump has also met with Uyghur Muslims and criticized China for human rights abuses against them. In contrast, Kamala Harris has not yet spoken extensively about China. However, she has stated in a public gathering that she aims for the U.S. to win the ongoing competition with China in the 21st century.¹⁹

Researchers believe that Harris's foreign policy towards China will not differ significantly from Biden's and will likely follow the 3C strategy: Competition, Confrontation, and Cooperation. In terms of cooperation, there are areas where collaboration with China could serve U.S. national interests. Competition, particularly in trade and Taiwan, will continue.

The main difference between Trump's and Harris's foreign policies towards China may be that Trump prioritizes the trade war, while for Harris, it will be one aspect of a broader foreign policy. Additionally, Harris's current National Security Advisor, Phil Gordon, is a strong NATO supporter. If Harris succeeds and Gordon remains in his position, Harris may work closely with allies in the Indo-Pacific region, such as Japan, India, Australia, and South Korea, to counter China's influence. With Gordon's presence, Harris is also likely to collaborate closely with NATO to address U.S. security challenges. The U.S. views



joint military exercises by Russian and Chinese forces near Alaska and Belarus as a security threat and will use NATO to counter this threat.²⁰

A common point in both Trump's and Harris's foreign policies towards China is their criticism of China for human rights violations and using this as a pressure tool. Harris has also strongly criticized China on human rights and freedom issues, and this stance is expected to continue if she succeeds. In 2019, Harris supported the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act in the Senate.

Regarding Taiwan, Harris follows Biden's policy of defending Taiwan and continuing military cooperation and assistance with the island.²¹

In summary, Trump's policy towards China is tougher than Kamala Harris's.

CONCLUSION

Regarding Afghanistan, both Trump and Harris have only spoken about the U.S. defeat during the withdrawal, blaming each other. Neither has announced a clear policy on the future of Afghanistan. In the Middle East, both defend Israel, but Trump's policy towards Palestine is more severe and aggressive than Harris's. Trump's stance on Iran is tougher than Harris's, while his policy towards Saudi Arabia is more lenient. Both take a hard stance against Iran's proxy groups in the Middle East.

Trump has stated that he would stop free aid to Ukraine and force them to sign a peace agreement to end the war. In contrast, Harris has said that they will defend and support Ukraine until the end and continue to provide free aid.

Trump's stance towards China is tougher than Harris's. If Trump wins, he will resume the trade war with China. Although Harris's foreign policy towards China is not clear, it can be said that she will likely continue Joe Biden's foreign policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1-Trump and Harris should clearly articulate their foreign policies regarding Afghanistan.
- 2- Whichever candidate wins the election should engage in dialogue with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan concerning its recognition, constitution, human rights, and official governance to resolve ongoing issues.
- 3- It is recommended that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan establish relations with the new U.S. administration and prioritize engagement over confrontation.

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