

# GREAT DECISIONS

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## The waning of Pax Americana?

### Acronyms and abbreviations

**ADB**—Asian Development Bank

**GATT**—General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

**GDP**—gross domestic product

**ISIS**—Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (IS—Islamic State; ISIL—Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant; Daesh)

**LIO**—liberal international order

**NATO**—North Atlantic Treaty Organization

**UKIP**—United Kingdom Independent Party

**UN**—United Nations

**UNSC**—United Nations Security Council

**USTR**—Office of the U.S. Trade Representative

**WTO**—World Trade Organization

### Glossary

**“America First”:** A campaign slogan used by Donald Trump in the 2016 U.S. presidential race to refer to his vow to prioritize America in economic and foreign policy issues.

**Abu Ghraib:** A prison in Abu Ghraib, Iraq, in operation from the 1950s to the 2010s. When the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003, it shared the facility with the Iraqi government. The prison later became a symbol of the human rights abuses committed there by the U.S. Army and the CIA against those incarcerated.

**“axis of evil”:** A phrase used by former U.S. President George W. Bush in his 2002 State of the Union address and reiterated during his administration to gain the support of the American public for the “War on Terror.” The phrase refers to those governments around the world that were allegedly attempting to obtain weapons of mass destruction and/or promoting terrorism. Throughout this period, the “axis of evil” generally implicated Iran, Iraq and North Korea.

**Baruch Plan:** A 1946 proposal by the U.S. government to achieve global cooperation on nuclear oversight by ceding the control of atomic weapons to the UN. Unable to achieve support, the plan was not established and in fact had the opposite effect than intended: a perilous Cold War nuclear arms race that pitted the U.S. and the Soviet Union against one another.

**Berlin blockade and airlift:** An international crisis in 1948–49 spurred by the Soviet Union’s decision to block rail, road and water communications, isolating West Berlin from the rest of Western Europe. In response, the U.S. and UK began to deliver food and other vitals to the city by air.

**Berlin Wall:** A wall built by the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) that divided Berlin and completely isolated West Berlin from the East between 1961 and 1989. Ideologically, the Eastern Bloc saw the Wall as a way to hinder the infiltration of “fascism” from the West. Physically, the Wall was a barrier to entry to the West for those in the Eastern Bloc who sought to emigrate or defect.

**Bretton Woods Agreement:** A 1944 agreement that established a system of regulations for the international monetary system founded on gold and the U.S. dollar, and creating the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). The system collapsed in 1971 when the U.S. “temporarily” suspended the gold standard.

**BRICS:** An acronym designating five countries with major emerging national economies—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa—which have met annually since 2009.

**Cold War:** A period of tension from the end of World War II to the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, establishing bipolarity between the communist Eastern Bloc (the Soviet Union and allies) and the capitalist and democratic West (the United States, NATO and their allies). While both sides fed regional proxy wars, the period was deemed “cold” because there were no large-scale or direct armed conflicts between the two polarities.

**Condoleezza Rice:** Former U.S. Secretary of Defense (2005–09) under then-President George W. Bush.

**Crimean War (1853–56):** A war fought by the Russian Empire against a coalition of the Ottoman Empire, France, Britain and Sardinia. Provoked by a conflict of interests regarding the rights of Christian minority groups in the Ottoman Empire, the war was more broadly brought about by opposition to Russian aspirations to gain territory as the Ottoman Empire declined.

**Cuban Missile Crisis:** A 13-day conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union in 1962, brought about by the deployment of U.S. ballistic missiles in Italy and Turkey and the subsequent deployment of Soviet missiles in Cuba. The conflict was the world came to a full-blown nuclear war during the Cold War period.

**Delcivism:** The theory that a country or society is gradually losing power and/or prestige and will continue to do so.

**Détente:** An warming of previously tense relations, particularly in the political sense.

**George Kennan:** A former U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union (May–September 1952), Kennan advocated for a U.S. policy that would prevent the expansion of Soviet influence during the Cold War. This policy was established in his 1946 “Long Telegram” from Moscow.

**General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT):** A 1947 multilateral treaty that limited or removed barriers to trade like tariffs and quotas in order to foster international trade. The agreement remained in effect until the World Trade Organization was created in 1995.

**Iraq War (2003–11):** An armed conflict, beginning with then-U.S. President George W. Bush’s declaration of a “War on Terror” in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. A U.S.-led alliance invaded Iraq and overthrew Saddam Hussein’s government, subsequently inciting opposition insurgencies that began fighting against the occupying forces and the post-Hussein Iraqi government. The Obama administration officially withdrew all U.S. combat troops from Iraq in December 2011.

**Iron Curtain:** A term coined by Winston Churchill in a 1946 speech to explain the division between East and West in post-World War II Europe.

**khanate:** The name for a political entity in the Mongolian Empire, including the Yuan dynasty, the Golden Horde, the Chagatai and the Ilkhanate.

**liberal international order:** A system of economic openness, political liberalism and multilateralism in a rules-based system perpetuated through institutions like the UN.

**Mao Zedong:** Chinese revolutionary leader and founder of the People’s Republic of China, which Mao led as Chairman of the Communist Party of China from 1949 until his death in 1976.

**Marshall Plan:** A four-year U.S. financial aid program established in 1948, which donated more than \$140 billion (current USD) to Western Europe after World War II to help rebuild the economy, industry and areas particularly ravaged by war, as well as to establish a strong anti-communist alliance.

**Mongol conquests:** A series of some of the deadliest conquests in human history in the 13th century, which created the Mongol Empire across Asia and Eastern Europe.

**Napoleonic Wars (1803–15):** A series of wars led by Napoleon I of the French Empire and allies against numerous British-led European powers.

**North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA):** An agreement signed by Canada, Mexico and the United States in 1994, creating a trilateral North American trade alliance.

**Osama bin Laden:** The founder of al-Qaeda, the organization responsible for the 9/11 attacks and other terrorist attacks around the world. A target of the “War on Terror,” bin Laden was shot and killed in 2011 on

the Obama administration's orders by the UN Naval Special Warfare Development Group and the CIA.

**Pax:** A period of relative stability in the international sphere, when one state establishes military hegemony.

**proxy war:** A war engaged in but not directly fought by a state or non-state actor.

**Soviet Bloc (Eastern Bloc):** The grouping of socialist states in Central and Eastern Europe during the Cold War, comprised generally of the Soviet Union and the signatories of the Warsaw Pact (Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland and Romania).

**sphere of influence:** A region where another powerful country does not have official authority but is able to wield influence.

**“Star Wars”:** Former President Ronald Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative, a proposed missile defense system. The Initiative was nicknamed “Star Wars” by the media in reference to the popular film.

**Taliban:** A Sunni Islamist fundamentalist political movement in Afghanistan currently waging war within the country. When the U.S. led an invasion into Afghanistan in 2001, the Taliban controlled most of the country. It was also supported by al-Qaeda with fighters from Arab countries and Central Asia.

**Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP):** Designed to deepen economic relations, cut tariffs, enhance trade and ultimately create a single market among 12 Pacific Rim countries, TPP was signed in February 2016. The Donald Trump administration pulled out of the treaty in January 2017.

**Truman Doctrine:** An American foreign policy created to counter Soviet geopolitical expansion during the Cold War, announced by then-President Harry Truman in 1947. It stipulated American support for other nations threatened by Soviet communism and proved fundamental to the formation of NATO in 1949.

**United Nations Security Council:** One of the six main organs of the United Nations. It works to maintain peace and security internationally, accept new members to the UN and approve changes to the UN Charter. The UNSC is the only UN body with the authority to issue binding resolutions to member states. Its 15 members include five permanent states —the victors of World War II, that is, the Soviet Union (now Russia), the UK, the U.S., France and China—who can veto any resolution, and 10 non-permanent, rotating members, representing various regions.

**Vietnam War (1955–75):** A war fought between North Vietnam—supported by the Soviet Union, China and other communist allies—and South Vietnam—supported by the U.S., South Korea, Australia, Thailand and other anti-communist allies.

**“War on Terror”:** An international military campaign initiated by the U.S. government after the 9/11 attacks in 2001.

**Winston Churchill:** The former prime minister of the UK (1940–45; 1951–55) who led the UK to victory in World War II.