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**REPORT**

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This report is presented for information only and does not represent the official view of the Assembly. It was prepared by Paul Cook, Director of the Economics and Security Committee.

1. From 7-8 December 2015, parliamentarians from both NATO and EU member countries gathered in Washington, DC for the NATO Parliamentary Assembly’s annual Parliamentary Transatlantic Forum. The meetings, jointly organized with the National Defense University and the Atlantic Council of the United States, were conducted under Chatham House. This document accordingly highlights the key themes of the discussions without attribution.

# An overview of transAtlantic Relations

1. The meetings took place in the wake of the Paris and San Bernardino attacks, events which were frequently evoked in the presentations and discussions as were similar attacks in Turkey, Lebanon and Egypt, where a Russian civilian aircraft crashed as a result of a terrorist attack. For several speakers, these tragic attacks, the disintegration of security throughout the broader Middle East, and Russia’s continued occupation of Crimea and support for separatists in Eastern Ukraine have made the purpose of NATO as important as it ever has been. The vitality of the Alliance was once again demonstrated by the NATO Council’s decision to invite Montenegro to join the Alliance.
2. The US government greatly values NATO and has strongly supported decisions to increase the presence of air, land and sea assets in Eastern Europe through the European Reassurance Initiative in order to enhance allied deterrence in an active and convincing fashion. The situation in the Baltic region has become worrying, and the United States has strongly supported the Enhanced Opportunity Partnership with five countries including Sweden and Finland, which work very closely with NATO to build security in the region. It is also working with allies to adopt additional measures on the southern flank. At the same time, the United States is working to improve Jordanian interoperability with NATO forces and is supporting an effort to enhance Iraq’s defence capacity. At the same time the United States is dedicated to denying Daesh[[1]](#footnote-1) territory and is also supporting what it deems moderate opposition forces in Syria, including the Kurds. It has helped build a coalition of 65 countries to counter Daesh, but it also recognizes that success ultimately requires a multi-pronged approach with important non-military dimensions.
3. The United States is supporting Vienna negotiations with key international players in order to build momentum for a political solution in Syria. It recognizes the urgency of the crisis, a condition made evident by the millions of people streaming out of Syria to the immediate neighbourhood and now to Europe. It is working to encourage Russia and Iran to distance their countries from Syrian President Assad, who US officials see as an impediment to the peaceful resolution of the crisis. It is also conveying to Russia that any attacks it launches in Syria should be targeted on Daesh and not on forces which are fighting for a legitimate alternative to Assad’s rule. Russia has assumed great risk in attacking these forces, and this was made evident when one of its fighter planes was recently shot down after it violated Turkish airspace. On Libya the United States is working to encourage a political settlement in that divided country, but it is difficult to deepen bilateral cooperation with that country until an internal accord is achieved.
4. The US government, with Congressional support, has provided $4.5 billion in support for refugees and for those countries hosting them. It recognizes that it needs to share this burden although the Forum took place at a moment when this issue had become a matter of partisan political debate in American politics. For its part, the Administration recognizes that, like its allies, it has an obligation to support the refugees and sees this as a strategic as well as a humanitarian obligation.
5. At the same time, the United States remains deeply concerned about Russian actions in Crimea. It recognizes that Ukraine sees its future in Europe and that Russian actions aim to thwart those ambitions. It is working to encourage Russia to comply with its obligations to carry out the Minsk agreements, including the return of all refugees, access for the OSCE mission, free elections in Donbas, the removal of foreign fighters and weapons and the return of border control to Ukraine. The Obama administration will maintain the sanctions regime until these and other conditions are met and it will uphold sanctions related to Crimea until Russia’s occupation of that Ukrainian region ends. At the same time, US officials are concerned about enduring corruption in Ukraine and the serious problems with its justice system. The United States has strongly supported Allied efforts to reinforce NATO’s presence in Eastern Europe and is dedicated to supporting all efforts to reassure those Allies that feel exposed to an increasingly aggressive Russia.
6. On the economic front, the Administration is very dedicated to seeing the TTIP negotiations to its conclusion in 2016, although a series of government to government agreements are still required. It recognizes that there is a shared trans-Atlantic economic and strategic interest in further opening trade between Europe and the United States. It sees this as crucial to fostering future economic growth and building a sense of shared interest across the Atlantic. It is also an important means of advancing a vision of more open markets on the global stage. Open trade represents a key tool for countering corruption. For all these reasons, the Obama Administration is very dedicated to building a more open trans-Atlantic and global trading order.
7. In terms of its own defense spending, a two year U.S. defense budget has been adopted to deal with the sequestration problem. US officials continue to see the Wales Summit defence spending commitments as crucial to boosting allied capabilities, something which has become all the more necessary given Russian actions in Ukraine, its threats to other countries in the region and the general degradation of the security situation in the Middle East.

# Russia

1. Russia emerged as a key theme during a number of discussions at this year’s Forum. Confronting Russia poses another of structural challenges for the democratic community of nations. The Kremlin is deploying hybrid warfare tactics and moves with adroitness and speed as President Putin has no obligation to consult Russian society or democratically constituted institutions before embarking on national adventures. This accords Russia a kind of tactical advantage insofar as it can move quickly to create facts on the ground, something it obviously has done in Crimea. Putin, however, is more a risk taking tactician than a long-term strategist. Russia’s recent actions, for example, have precipitated a rapid degradation of relations with Turkey, which had previously sought to reach out to Moscow. Russia’s continued overflight of Turkish airspace reflects the far more aggressive posture its air force has adopted in recent years not only in the Middle East but also in the Baltic and the High North. Russian actions in Ukraine have triggered economic sanctions which are undermining economic confidence in the country and have generally isolated Russia from the rest of the international community. In a matter of a year Russia has fallen from a position as the world’s 6th largest economy to the 16th. Its standard of living is falling, and there are few prospects of positive change on this front. This risks alienating an important part of the elite in Russian society. Indeed talented young people have begun to flee, and this will further weaken the country and diminish its economic prospects over the long term. Corruption remains endemic, and anytime new dynamic firms emerge, parasitic forces with links to the state prey on these firms driving them out of business. This is hardly a way to build a prosperous, competitive and diversified economy.
2. The Kremlin has also begun to brandish its nuclear arsenal in a provocative, worrying and strategically destabilizing manner. Its emerging nuclear doctrine is aggressive and even foresees the use of tactical nuclear weapons as part of its de-escalation strategy.
3. Democracies are significantly more deliberative and are simply not positioned to respond with alacrity to changes in the international environment. This accords President Putin a certain advantage, and NATO member countries are challenged to manage this asymmetry. But allied countries do require certain capabilities to ensure that they have a degree of credibility. Deterrence of dangerous behaviour is simply impossible without those capabilities as deterrence requires measures like military exercises, rotating force presence in regions at risk, and a credible set of threats backed by real capabilities to discourage Russian adventurism. The goal here is obviously not to fight a war with Russia but to ensure that it is not tempted into actions that inexorably lead to military confrontation. The challenge is mounting, and Russia now appears to be linking the Eastern European and Middle Eastern theaters into a broader strategic whole. In short, everything is now connected and this undermines the notion that NATO confronts challenges on separate fronts. In many respects, these fronts are linking up.
4. The United States accordingly recognizes that its allies need to build up their own deterrence capacities. There has been a tendency in some European circles to see the United States as the Walmart of western armaments. This is a very dangerous assumption as US stockpiles are structured to meet US and not allied military requirements. In short, Allied forces need to fill their own shelves to endow themselves with military and deterrence capabilities commensurate with the current set of threats. US leaders suggest that Europe must demonstrate that its own militaries are in a position to counter any aggression on the continent assuming that the US forces would not be there immediately. This requires genuine capabilities and, by extension, significant and well targeted defence spending. The United States will not likely return to the old practice of stationing three armoured divisions on the continent. It is up to Europe to create the requisite deterrence capacity that US forces once mustered.
5. But military deterrence alone is not sufficient to meet the challenge. A robust information policy is also essential. The Kremlin’s information strategy is sophisticated, even if the information it peddles is highly distorted. The Western community of nations needs to ensure that another more truthful and complete narrative is in place to compete with these prevarications.
6. Along these lines, it is important to pay attention to the language of President Putin and those around him. They mean what they say. Moscow is seeking a sphere of influence in what was the Soviet space and this includes the three Baltic countries and other NATO members in the East. Russia is not at all happy with the post-cold war order, and has very explicitly become a revisionist power which has already embarked upon a strategy aiming to use frozen conflicts to upset that order. Its operations in Georgia and Ukraine should be understood in this light. They have deployed all manner of assets to achieve this ambition, including the penetration of government ministries with intelligence assets. Russia’s penchant for using frozen conflicts to gain regional leverage is hardly new. As the Soviet Union fell apart, Russia played an instrumental role in fanning the flames of conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Ajaria and Transnistria. Those who argue that Russia’s current frozen conflict strategy is a response to NATO enlargement must recognize that these conflicts unfolded before NATO Enlargement was even on the table.
7. Displays of benign economic imperialism are also evident, particularly the energy sector. It routinely seeks to exercise political suasion through pipeline politics. Corruption is another means by which Russian authorities assert influence in Europe, and there is evidence that it has funnelled funds to certain political parties that align with its European ambitions. Russian media is yet another lever that the Kremlin exploits as it is exclusively structured to support the government. Obviously this cannot be said for much of the Western media. Truth counts for little in Russian media and when evidence fails to support the Kremlin’s position, the very notion of objective knowledge is quickly subverted. Finally, the Kremlin does not hesitate to foment ethnic disputes if the outcome of tension serves its interest. All of this activity is destabilizing and, indeed, it is expressly designed to be so. It is important to recognize as well that Western governments are not immune to this pressure. On the very day the Wales Summit ended, Russian security forces crossed the Estonian border and seized an Estonian official in a clear attempt to undermine NATO solidarity.
8. Russia’s challenge, moreover, is not regional, but global in scope, and this is clearly playing out in Syria where Russia has sought to interject itself. It has done so in a very destabilizing manner consistent with its zero sum vision of international politics. Its bombing campaign has focused more on those forces working with the international community than Daesh, and it is clearly seeking to defend the Assad regime.
9. It has been said that the only thing more destabilizing than two sides escalating a crisis is one side doing so. The Kremlin has put Russia on a Cold War footing. This requires a significant reinforcement of NATO’s deterrent posture or else there is a risk that Russia will push further to undermine the European security order. Russia has been running large scale exercises involving the nuclear triad. In some writing, they seem to foresee the use of tactical nuclear weapons as part of a de-escalation strategy which would be highly destabilizing and dangerous. US policy in recent years has been to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in strategic doctrine, although the United States is not unilaterally disarming. NATO remains a nuclear alliance and needs to deter Russia from contemplating the use of nuclear weapons.

# Military Transformation

1. The discussion in the United States about the revolution in military affairs is at least 25 years old. The US government has long felt pressures to push for profound technological and doctrinal change in order to maintain its global military edge. This discussion has carried on until the present. US strategic thinking is now largely focused on three revisionist powers: Russia, China and Iran. The challenges these countries pose are serious and they are mounting at a moment when the United States is losing its near monopoly in certain military capabilities including anti‑access/area denial.
2. Military planners today are compelled to operate in an area of big data, cyber war, artificial intelligence and new ways to deploy traditional platforms. New technologies in biology and direct energy could alter the very nature of warfare. Anti-satellite systems might counter advantages garnered over decades in space while undersea infrastructure could well become a central plank of future warfare. National militaries once shunned urban fighting but most warfare today, in fact, is conducted in urban settings, and this too demands new thinking and technology. Robotics and computer are quickening the pace of warfare. All of these technological changes require military and political leaders to rethink doctrine, tactics and strategy. US leaders have discussed military transformation for decades but have not moved quickly to implement change. Comprehensive changes are now needed in military planning, acquisition strategies and in the very structure of the military in order to improve coherence and flexibility.
3. One of the problems is that the United States is now emerging from 14 years of counter‑insurgency warfare, and this has distracted attention from the broader challenge of military transformation. In that period, technologies which the United States once monopolized are now more diffuse and the capabilities gaps across these technologies have narrowed. Even declining powers like Russia pose serious challenges as they have managed to capture some of these technologies and integrate them into their military posture and doctrine. What these means is not fully understood by defense planners who need to do more war gaming and simulations to better fathom what is transpiring.
4. These changes are also unfolding at a time of constraints in military spending. Defense budget cuts have compelled the US military to make difficult choices and there has been a sharp decrease in the number of ground forces. Yet personnel costs are rising and there has been a significant increase in the cost per soldier in the era of the professional military when salaries are very high and efforts to minimize casualties become even more expensive. The United States has effectively priced itself out of conducting certain kinds of warfare. The problem becomes all the more apparent in an era in which the military has been engaged in asymmetrical warfare when it spends billions to protect its forces from improvised and fundamentally cheap weapons. This too compels the military to become far more efficient in its spending, but as the F-35 program has demonstrated, it is very difficult to manage costs in an era of shifting strategic realities and political and economic uncertainties. Speed of acquisition and deployment are a critical dimension of achieving strategic advantage but this is proving elusive given the myriad roadblocks to rapid programme development.
5. The deadlock in US politics constitutes another source of rigidity, and a highly partisan political climate has made it difficult to discuss transformative military concepts. There is also a tendency to get bogged down in goals that are not necessarily capabilities driven. NATO’s 2% guidelines might be one example here. On the face of it, the numbers seem arbitrary, and in many respects do not factor in other potentially more important drivers of battlefield advantage. A higher degree of interoperability represents a case in point. The 2% standard serves a political end insofar as it helps muster resources, but governments must go much further than this. NATO now confronts a crisis rooted in the widening capabilities gap between the United States and Europe. The gap seems to be growing with time and might ultimately prove difficult to reverse. Managing this problem will be a central challenge for the Alliance over the coming years.

# Syria, Iraq and the Fight against DAESH

1. The many challenges posed by Daesh came up throughout this year’s Forum, and it is clearly seen as a major challenge in Washington. It is important to place this problem in perspective. One could argue that Daesh is only the most recent manifestation of a challenged rooted in what many see as the region’s fundamentally illegitimate state system. The year 1924 marked the end of the last caliphate in that region, and the vacuum created by its demise has never been adequately filled. This issue is at least partly overlain with religious questions. This observation is important because even if Daesh were rapidly defeated, some of the underlying conditions that led to its creation would not have necessarily gone away.
2. There is a US tendency to believe that the arc of history bends toward democracy and liberalism and that groups, such as Daesh, have no legitimacy, at least in part, because they reject such thinking. This assumption has clearly illuminated the Obama administration’s thinking and rhetoric about Daesh. But this view does not fully consider the context of contemporary Middle East politics. Similarly, the West saw the Arab uprisings in 2011 through the lens of democratic aspirations and were accordingly all the more shocked when events actually pushed the region further away from the liberal democratic ideal. Many in the region drew the lesson that peaceful change in the Middle East will not work, and that violence will be a critical arbiter of the shape the region ultimately assumes. Authoritarian regimes and even their opponents have taken those lessons on board. Many actors in the region now see violence as a critical component of achieving political victory. In this regard, Daesh has achieved more than most opponents as it has actually carved out a piece of territory for itself and employed quasi-state functions to rule that territory.
3. The problem is that even if Daesh were defeated tomorrow, it has established a kind of gold standard to which other extremists will aspire. They have also inserted into the political debate the notion of establishing a region-wide caliphate. This does not augur well for the region’s longer term stability as this notion directly challenges the current order. In this sense, the ideas Daesh has brought to the table are more potent and dangerous than those advanced by Al Qaeda, which had little to say about governance. They have also made the Muslim Brotherhood, in its various guises, look weak and ineffectual, a message that Egypt’s military coup has only reinforced. Daesh has pointed to that coup as providing proof that the Brotherhood model of reconciling the Islamic faith with the modern state has failed.
4. Neither the EU nor the United States are intellectually and politically prepared to cope with this particular problem. The Middle East is in the midst of a very serious crisis of political legitimacy and the Western approach appears to focus on doubling down on an old strategy of working with authoritarian allies. This will not likely lead to longer term solutions as real solution would first require genuine political reform and greater political accountability for national leaders. It is precisely the lack of reform and the absence of resilient democratic processes and institutions which lie at the root of today’s chaos. The fight against Daesh now seems to overshadow such considerations, but the attendant instability and violence is only worsening the situation.
5. This problem cannot be contained to the Middle East. The 13 November 2015 attacks in Paris were planned in Raqqa, Syria thereby giving lie to the notion that Daesh is simply a regional phenomenon and poses no immediate threat to the international community. Western governments have been relatively slow to understand the nature of the challenge. The US Administration has largely employed an Iraq first strategy and initially responded to Daesh by providing additional support to the Iraqi military and later launching a rescue of the besieged Yezidi in Sinjar. The problem is that Daesh is headquartered in Syria. Until very recently US efforts in Syria had been limited. The arm and equip programme for Syrian anti-Assad forces was highly problematic and eventually abandoned. Many of these forces could not be convinced to focus on Daesh and their piecemeal introduction into the battlefield was catastrophic. This was followed by an air campaign. But Daesh simply cannot be defeated by air attacks alone and the Obama Administration is perfectly aware of this. It wants Kurdish and Arab forces to take up the ground campaign. This will take time and there are no real prospects that Kurdish forces will fight in Arab lands. Given the current level of forces engaged, outright victory is only plausible where the roots of Daesh are very shallow. Indeed, those roots are shallower in Syria than in Iraq, where the United States originally concentrated its effort.
6. Indeed, the real issue is political illegitimacy and power vacuums. In the near term, the international community needs to focus on helping the Syrians to establish a modicum of good governance while a civil-military stabilization plan is introduced. Russia and Iran need to pressure the Assad regime to abstain from the daily atrocities that have only fomented the uprising and triggered the refugee crisis. In short, Assad’s policy has created recruits for Daesh. But if the Russians and Iranians will not even do this, than it is unreasonable to expect them to pressure Assad to abdicate. Ultimately one cannot rule out the possibility that the international community, including regional powers, may need to deploy forces to defeat Daesh on the battlefield even if this does not solve the larger problem. But the price of intervention would be high, and the state‑building project would be daunting. It has been estimated that rebuilding the Syrian army alone would cost $3-10 billion a year for at least five years.
7. It is also important to recognize that though Daesh has used religion cynically, the power of the call to defend the faith resonates in some circles. Daesh has perverted Islam to serve their political ends, but they have recognized its power, particularly in a setting where state authority has all but collapsed. Daesh has been very deliberate and methodical in this effort, and it would be a mistake to write off its leaders as madmen. To do so would simply lead the international community to underestimate the nature of the threat. Daesh is goal oriented and strategic in its thinking. It is also less deeply rooted in Syria than it is in Iraq, but chaos in Syria has provided it with a vacuum to exploit. In Iraq, Daesh is simply the continuation of an insurgency that the US “surge” never quite quelled and that the US occupation had triggered. Nouri al-Maliki’s highly sectarian Shia government helped revivify the Sunni insurgency which ultimately took the virulent form now embodied in Daesh.
8. It is also interesting to note that Tunisia, the one potential Arab Spring success story, has been the largest contributor to Daesh in relative terms. One explanation is the crisis of expectations in that country. Tunisian young people are graduating from high school and university with absolutely no economic prospects. The utter lack of economic promise invariably erodes the legitimacy of the state. The Tunisian case suggests that there is also an economic component to the Daesh phenomenon. Finally, Western governments need to recognize that the rise of Islamophobia in the West will invariably bolster Daesh’s capacity to recruit both in the region and internationally.
9. It is also essential to keep the humanitarian dimensions of this security disaster in focus. The population of Syria was 22 million at the beginning of the conflict and it now stands at 16 million. Millions of Syrians have determined that they have no future in their own country and have simply left. This has created enormous pressure on the region and now on Europe. Ultimately the failure of the international community to hammer out an early response to the political crisis in Syria has been a central factor in this humanitarian crisis. If this huge exodus breeds Islamophobia in the West, the situation will only grow worse.

# Iran

1. Speakers at the meeting held different views of the recent Iranian nuclear deal. The Obama administration cautiously sees the accord as a potential break that may give Iranian society, which is far less hostile to the West than its government, an opportunity to alter the direction of government in that country. But domestic politics in Iran is highly complex, and it is often difficult to understand how decisions are made. Indeed, Iran is not governed by a genuinely unified state, and public opinion is also highly fractured. There is a clear divergence between the very conservative rural regions of Iran and the more progressive and internationalist urban public. The President does not really rule the country as the Supreme Leader has ultimate control of the armed forces, the media, security, justice, the police and the most meaningful instruments of power. The nuclear agreement has accordingly moved through a power structure that is highly opaque and not as open to a dialogue with the West as some might think.
2. Under the terms of the agreement, the international community will lift sanctions when Iran has fully dismantled the reactor at Arak and limited the number of centrifuges in operation. Until they have met the conditions of the agreement, there can be no sanctions relief. There are considerations of regional politics and Iran’s tempestuous relations with the Gulf States looming behind Iranian calculations. The nuclear agreement hardly begins to solve deeper underlying problems, which also have sectarian dimensions. In some Western and Gulf circles, there are concerns that the deal will grant Iran access to funds that it can deploy to upset the regional balance of power, even though some hope that the additional funds would rather underwrite a domestic political and economic transition that will result in the emergence of a more moderate and liberal Iran.
3. The current expectation is that Iran will be able to export 600,000 barrels of oil and possibly 800,000 barrels per day by 2016. But this hinges on how quickly it can get its facilities back on line. The real economic benefits to Iran are more difficult to gauge, in part, because its economy is so inefficient and poorly structured. Iran remains a very difficult place to do business so investors are less likely to flock to Iran than is often presumed. One should be sanguine about the development of its gas industry for this very reason, despite its substantial endowments. It needs significant investment in plant and pipelines to tap into it its huge gas fields and it now also confronts the problem of low energy prices as well as political uncertainty, both of which will tend to deter investors.
4. Iran could also use these additional resources to upgrade its air force, purchase new fighter planes and upgrade its long range cruise missiles. With the recent evidence that Iran had an active military nuclear programme in place as recently as 2009, including a nuclear warhead design programme, there are now deep concerns about these missile systems. Iran has consistently lied about these programmes. It is also embarked upon an investment programme in its asymmetric war capabilities including anti-ship missiles which could be deployed in the Gulf.
5. It is important to fit the Iranian nuclear question into a broader regional perspective. There are, for example, outstanding concerns that a significant share of any windfall that does accrue to Iran as a result of the end of sanctions, would then be spent in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon where Iranian nationals and/or allies depend upon Iranian state support. The region faces two serious challenges: extremist Sunni sub-national actors like al-Qaeda and Daesh and Shia Fundamentalist radicalism linked to Persian hegemonic nationalism. There are several analytical perspectives on the potential impact of the Iranian nuclear agreement.
* It will have no genuine impact and Iran will surreptitiously continue to pursue its military nuclear weapons programme, although the time horizon will be extended.
* The agreement will not alter the underlying rivalries in the region but should help calm the waters at least for the next several years.
* The deal will contribute to the transformation of Iran—although there is little evidence to date that this is unfolding.
* The deal will embolden Iran to push for more concessions and greater influence.
* There are clearly some worrying trends. The military continues to develop asymmetric military capabilities, which, among other things, might give it the power to close the Straits of Hormuz. Even if the nuclear deal is implemented, these developments will remain a source of contention and concern.

# The US Presidential Campaign

1. To begin to understand what is transpiring in the US Presidential campaign on both the Democratic and Republican sides, it is useful to recognize that since the 1970s party reforms have given the rank and file a far greater say in selecting the party standard bearers. This has opened up the process while reducing the capacity of party elites to dictate terms to the general public. Part of the turmoil in the campaign so far reflects these long-term changes, but there are other factors at play as well.
2. One lesson the Republican Party derived from the 2012 elections was that it had taken Mitt Romney far too long to win the requisite number of primary votes. This seemed to have put him at a disadvantage in the general election. In an effort to prevent this from happening again, the party introduced several rules changes that some saw as an effort to empower party insiders and their favored candidates. Things have not turned out as expected. At the time of the Forum, there were still 14 active candidates for the Republican nomination and many indications that the selection process could extend to June 2016 or even longer.
3. Another change that has altered the calculus is money. In the landmark Citizen United decision, the Supreme Court ruled that personal donations can be limited to $2,700 per candidate per election and primaries and general elections count separately. But the Court has ruled that there can be no limitations on group spending and individual contributions to those groups. This has opened up a Pandora’s Box and election spending in the United States has soared. Jeb Bush has raised $133 million of which $25 million has been raised by his own campaign and the rest from outside groups. Hillary Clinton has raised $98 million largely through her campaign. Ted Cruz has raised $68 million, Marco Rubio, $47 million and Bernie Sanders $44 million although Sanders accepts no money from outside groups.
4. The media has played a critical role in the campaign so far. In some important respects, it has been a more decisive factor than campaign contributions. The Trump phenomenon can partly be explained by his capacity to draw media attention without spending campaign funds. The lesson is that under certain circumstances, outrage can pay and, insofar as it keeps a candidate’s name in the headlines, it can also cancel the advantage of money.
5. The role of the media in the Presidential sweepstakes has also shifted. Where once all Americans received news largely through common sources—primarily network television— today Americans go to news sources that largely reinforce their own ideological proclivities. This is one explanation for mounting partisanship and fragmentation in American political life. It is also worth noting that news organizations, operating in highly competitive conditions, need to sell news, and this tends to reward sensationalism. Election coverage today features personality and the horse race over policy matters. The public is less well-informed as a result while partisanship is only reinforced.
6. When assessing this campaign, it is important to recognize that national polls mean far less than state polls. There are significant differences between the general public and the electorate as many Americans simply do not vote. Twice as many people vote in the general elections as in the primaries. In Iowa typically only 120 thousand people participate in the caucuses that chose the party standard-bearers. All states except two have a winner-take-all system so campaigning for the general elections largely takes place in those swing states which are in play, not those states which are clearly in either the Republican or Democratic camp. Appearances in those states that are already clearly red or blue are more about fundraising. One potentially critical factor in the coming primaries is that the core element of support for Donald Trump is a group that typically votes in very low numbers. His current numbers may therefore overstate his potential support in the coming primaries.
7. The Republican campaign seems to be narrowing to two outsiders—Trump and Carson—and two insiders—Cruz and Rubio. Donald Trump has surprised many analysts, but his appeal to less educated white voters is compelling. University-educated Republicans are dividing their support among several candidates. It is not likely that a high percentage of Trump supporters will come to the Iowa caucuses given the complexity and challenge of the process. Many of his supporters have no history of political activism, and the caucus system is biased toward activists given the long hours required to participate in the final tally. The New Hampshire primary, by contrast, is an open process and this might be more amenable to Trump supporters.
8. The driving force in the general elections is partisanship. Here it is worth recognizing that there is a degree of broad parity in terms of partisanship and this is one reason why government in the United States has tended to be divided in recent years. This would likely persist if Hillary Clinton were to win the coming Presidential elections. The Republicans will very likely maintain their hold on the House although the Senate could be up for grabs.
9. The demographics of the country are also shifting, and this could tend to favour Democrats. The United States is becoming ever more multi-cultural, and polls suggest that young people and minorities are more oriented toward the Democratic Party and its agenda. There is also a gender gap with a significant majority of women supporting the Democrats. The Republican base is white older men, and in demographic terms, this group is shrinking relative to other groups. Unless the Republicans can extend their appeal more broadly, their overall support could slip over the coming years. Republican insiders understand that the party will increasingly need to appeal to Latinos and women, and some see the rhetoric in the current campaign as a setback. Donald Trump has overtly appealed to angry white male voters in his campaign and has partly set the terms of the debate by appealing to those who have felt left behind in the current globalized economy. Ted Cruz has been very cautious in his approach to Donald Trump and his supporters. He seems to have assumed that the Trump candidacy will implode and hopes to win over Trump supporters. Marco Rubio seems to be slanting more for the establishment wing of the party.
10. This campaign season has increasingly focused on the interaction between US politics and global affairs. The advantages fall in different ways to the two major parties. The national economy has come a long way since the onset of the global economic crisis in 2007. The unemployment rate is now at 5% and incomes are rising. Economic growth tends to favour the party that holds the Presidency.
11. The international situation, however, is highly uncertain and has been characterized by a great deal of chaos and disorder for which there appear few apparent solutions. Historically Republicans have argued that disorder should be met with stern international policies, and this could appeal to voters distraught by a chaotic world. Republican candidates have advocated a deepening of sanctions against Russia and the arming of Ukrainian forces but, there is no support for a massive deployment of forces into Syria.
12. It is nonetheless worth noting that Hillary Clinton has advocated more muscular policies than President Obama, and this could help her in a general election. For example, she pushed for an early intervention in Syria and subsequent events could retrospectively seem to vindicate that stance. Clinton’s nomination looks increasingly likely despite the surprisingly strong performance of Bernie Sanders. This suggests that whoever wins the Presidency will likely move U.S. foreign and defense policy in a more hawkish direction although the Democrats would continue to support broadly the notion of multilateralism. Both Republicans and Democrats will expect Europeans to bolster their own spending on defense in order to shoulder a greater share of the international security burden. The Republicans are also likely to push for opening up energy exports to Europe to help wean it from its unhealthy dependence on Russian energy.

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1. Daesh, the Arabic acronym will mainly be used to refer to the armed terrorist group also known as the so‑called Islamic State or ISIS [↑](#footnote-ref-1)