

On the Horizon

What to Watch in 2019



Wilson Center Experts Weigh In





*“There are many voices of counsel,
but few voices of vision.”*

- Woodrow Wilson

Decoding a World of Change for Washington

In a world marked by complexity, volatility, and a din of competing agendas, the Wilson Center is the nation’s indispensable resource for decoding today’s most pressing foreign policy challenges. Leveraging its global expertise and perspective, award-winning scholarship and analysis, and a fiercely nonpartisan spirit, the Center informs actionable ideas for policymakers across the political spectrum.

Chartered by Congress 50 years ago as a living memorial to President Wilson, the Center’s work today spans more than a dozen regional and thematic programs to tackle hot-button security issues – from the North Korean nuclear threat to the implications of a risen China and from North American trade to global cyberwarfare. The Center also serves a vital role in linking Washington to the world, hosting U.S. lawmakers and leaders from around globe, while continually expanding its unparalleled network of some 5,000 former fellows.

The next generation of policy leaders will also trace its roots to the Wilson Center, as the Foreign Policy Fellowship Program and Cybersecurity and AI Labs connect select Congressional staff with top scholars and practitioners to help prepare them for current and future challenges.

Jane Harman

Director, President, and CEO

Frederic V. Malek






Chairman of the Board of Trustees

One Woodrow Wilson Plaza
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20004-3027

Aaron C. Jones

Director of Congressional Relations

Aaron.Jones@wilsoncenter.org
202.691.4140

 www.wilsoncenter.org
 wwics@wilsoncenter.org
 facebook.com/woodrowwilsoncenter
 [@thewilsoncenter](https://twitter.com/thewilsoncenter)
 202.691.4000

Our Programs

Africa Program	1
Asia Program	3
Brazil Institute	5
Canada Institute	7
China - Kissinger Institute on China and the United States	9
Environmental Change and Security Program	11
Global Women’s Leadership Initiative	13
Korean Peninsula - Hyundai Motor-Korea Foundation Center for Korean History and Public Policy	15
History and Public Policy Program	16
Latin American Program	17
Mexico Institute	19
Middle East Program	21
Nuclear Studies	16
Polar Institute	23
Russia and Eurasia - Kennan Institute	25
Science, Technology, and Innovation Program	27

3 things to watch: AFRICA



1

Nigerian Elections, Continental Stakes






Nigeria – Africa’s most populous country and biggest oil-producer – is bracing for national and state elections in February-March. The presidential contest between 76-year-old incumbent Muhammadu Buhari and 71-year-old former Vice President Atiku Abubakar appears too close to call. Security issues loom large, with the hardline Islamist sect [Boko Haram](#) showing resilience, and farmers and herders clashing over land and water. Meanwhile, weak electoral and judicial institutions threaten the integ-

riety of the electoral process and raise [the specter](#) of past election-related violence. Nigeria has long served as a bellwether for stability and democratic development in Africa, and the upcoming vote will likewise have continent-wide implications. The international community can play a positive role by emphasizing electoral accountability and supporting civil society and community leaders who have shown commitment to fairness and responsibility.

Featured Experts:

[Monde Muyangwa](#), Director, Africa Program

[Michael Morrow](#), Senior Diplomatic Fellow, Africa Program

-  www.wilsoncenter.org/africa
-  africa@wilsoncenter.org
-  facebook.com/africaprogram
-  [@AfricaUpClose](https://twitter.com/AfricaUpClose)
-  202.691.4158



2

A Test for South Africa's ANC

Elections are set for May in South Africa, the continent's second-largest economy and anchor of the 16-country Southern African Development Community. The African National Congress (ANC), led by current President Cyril Ramaphosa, dominates the political scene, holding more than 62% of seats in parliament. The real question is whether the ANC – which has won every election since taking power in 1994, albeit with a steadily declining majority – will exceed expectations or underperform. The

former would allow Ramaphosa to further consolidate his power within the deeply riven ANC and bolster his drive for investment, growth, and fiscal prudence. A poor ANC performance would weaken the president, who will face reelection by the national assembly after the parliamentary vote. If the party drops below 50%, it would need to seek one or more coalition partners. Observers within and far beyond Africa will be watching to see whether significant political change is in store.



3

Opportunities for U.S. Business

Driven by a surging youth population and rapid urbanization, Africa is home to many of the world's fastest-growing economies and biggest opportunities. With growth prospects in the coming five years among the world's highest, the continent has the potential to become a global engine of economic development. U.S. competitors such as China are already heavily engaged in the continent's economic space. For [America's part](#), the recently passed BUILD Act creates a new agency to better incentivize private-sector investment in

emerging economies. Last summer, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross led the President's Advisory Council on Doing Business in Africa on a two-week visit to the continent to support the expansion of U.S. businesses. These steps, together with last year's signing of a [Continental Free Trade Agreement](#) among 49 African countries, provide plentiful opportunity for American businesses willing to take advantage. To what degree will they do so, sustainably, in 2019?

3 things to watch: ASIA 19



1

America in Search of an Asia Strategy

While the Trump administration has identified the overarching theme of its [strategy toward the Indo-Pacific](#) – geopolitical competition with China – it will seek to turn those ideas into concrete policies that actually enhance the ability of the United States to compete with Beijing for [strategic advantage](#). While joining a multilateral trade agreement like the TPP seems impossible at this point, Washington may seek to conclude several bilateral economic agreements with Japan, Taiwan,

and countries in Southeast Asia. And yet, lingering disputes over industrial policies, with the potential imposition by the United States of new tariffs, threaten to undermine efforts to work with allies and partners to compete against China. Moreover, ambitions to enhance the military capabilities of critical partners in the region or build more infrastructure across Asia will run into tightening budget constraints.

Featured Experts:

[Abraham Denmark](#), Director, Asia Program and Senior Fellow, Kissinger Institute on China and the United States

[Michael Kugelman](#), Deputy Director for South Asia, Asia Program

[Shihoko Goto](#), Senior Associate for Northeast Asia, Asia Program

- 🌐 www.wilsoncenter.org/asia
- ✉ asia@wilsoncenter.org
- 📘 facebook.com/AsiaProgram
- 🐦 [@AsiaProgram](https://twitter.com/AsiaProgram)
- 📞 202.691.4020





2

Japan as Regional Leader

In 2019, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will become the longest-serving politician among the G7 leaders. As the United States repositions itself in the Asia-Pacific and China continues to expand its regional influence, Japan will have [a bigger role](#) in determining how stability in the region is maintained. As a sign of its growing stature as a driver of [economic integration](#) and a defender of the established order, Japan will play host to the G20 in Osaka and is gearing up for the 2020 Summer Olympics. Abe's signature economic achievement,

the CPTPP, will come into force, playing a critical role in Tokyo's efforts to hedge against a hostile China and a distracted United States by building [closer ties](#) with like-minded partners around the region. Meanwhile, he will continue to push his ambitions to reform Japan's approach to national security by enhancing the country's military capabilities, strengthening the alliance with the United States and acquiring more American military equipment (and potentially raising the possibility of amending the pacifist constitution).



3

A Possible End to America's Longest War

After years of on-and-off negotiations, the potential for progress in [peace talks](#) between the United States and the Taliban will be front and center in 2019. However, tremendous uncertainty continues to plague Afghanistan's future. It is unclear how far the peace talks can go. Will Washington retain access to military bases in Afghanistan, and will it retain a small contingent to provide embassy security and limited counterterrorism functions? If talks progress to the point of direct negotiations between

the Taliban and Kabul, how amenable will the Taliban be to sharing power and participating in elections? Would the Taliban really agree to peacefully become a part of the political process, and would it respect the Afghan constitution and the rights of women? After an agreement, there is significant danger of further violence and instability in the country – potentially to the point of another civil war. The question for Washington is whether, after 18 years of conflict, it is willing to take such a risk.

3 things to watch: **BRAZIL**



1

Democracy on Watch

Brazilian democracy has proven its resilience over the past three decades: it has survived the impeachment of two presidents, damaging economic recessions, hyperinflation, and ongoing investigations into systemic corruption at the highest levels of government and business (which has led to the [imprisonment](#) of a former president). However, the [stunning election](#) of Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency laid bare the deep polarization present in Bra-

zilian society and the exhaustion of the traditional political elite. The president's past statements have also raised concerns regarding his commitment to democratic norms, the rule of law, and [human rights](#), especially the rights of minorities, women, and the LGBTQ community. The press and judiciary remain independent and highly professional, but this issue will be one to watch in 2019.

Featured Experts:

[Paulo Sotero](#), Director, Brazil Institute

[Oscar Vilhena Vieira](#), Global Fellow, Brazil Institute

[Fabio Bechara](#), Global Fellow, Brazil Institute

-  <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/brazil>
-  brazil@wilsoncenter.org
-  facebook.com/brazilinstitute
-  [@brazilInst](https://twitter.com/brazilInst)
-  202.691.4087 / 202.691.4147



2

A 'Now' Moment for U.S. Ties?

The election of far-right populist Bolsonaro has led many to conclude that the moment is ideal for deepening U.S.-Brazil relations. The Brazilian president – whom the American press has taken to calling the “Trump of the tropics” – has openly declared his admiration for his U.S. counterpart and his desire for stronger relations. He seems to [share Trump’s concerns](#) regarding China and his distaste for multilateralism. The U.S. administration seems to return the favor: John Bolton reportedly issued an invitation for Bolsonaro to visit Washing-

ton early in his presidency. The Boeing-Embraer deal is also seen as a positive step toward stronger commercial ties. However, there is a long tradition of declaring “now is the moment” for U.S.-Brazil ties, even as the relationship has remained characterized by working-level dialogue that produces few significant high-level initiatives. The Bolsonaro administration has already backtracked on its campaign pledge to leave the Paris climate accord. Will this trend change in the year ahead?



3

Fertile Ground for Disinformation

Social media has had a profound impact on political debates worldwide, and Brazil is no exception. Some 130 million Brazilians are active on social media, and according to the Reuters Institute, 66 percent of Brazilians get at least some of their news from social media. Given the high penetration, political actors have come to view Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, WhatsApp, and other platforms as effective vehicles for reaching the electorate. The successful campaign of President Bolsonaro

demonstrated the power of using social media to shape debate, while it has also proven to be a key tool for grassroots organizing and activists, as in the case of the recent #EleNão protests. However, the 2018 elections also [made it clear](#) that the challenges of misinformation and disinformation are here to stay, compounded by low trust in institutions and politicians in Brazil. This fertile ground for disinformation will be an area to watch in the first year of the new administration.

3 things to watch: CANADA



1

The Weakening U.S. Alliance

The new U.S. policy of unilateralism in economic and foreign relations is threatening to break or significantly reconfigure traditional alliances. One of the first casualties is the U.S.-Canada relationship. Some of the major challenges of the past two years include the public campaign against NAFTA, national security tariffs levied against Canada, and most recently, Canada's arrest of a Huawei official at the request of U.S. law enforcement (which the White House subsequently disavowed). While some aspects

of the relationship remain as strong as ever – especially technical cooperation at the working level and military and security relationships – Canadians are feeling increasingly alienated from the United States. They are looking to fill the gap with alliances in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. As the largest buyer of U.S. exports, and the primary buffer against military attacks across the Arctic, the loss of Canada could significantly affect U.S. prosperity and well-being.

Featured Experts:

- [Laura Dawson](#), Director, Canada Institute
- [Alan Bersin](#), former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security; Global Fellow, Canada Institute
- [Bruce Heyman](#), former U.S. Ambassador to Canada; Board Member, Canada Institute

- www.wilsoncenter.org/canada
- canada@wilsoncenter.org
- facebook.com/CanadaInstitute
- @CanadaInstitute
- 202.691.4301





2

The Fate of the USMCA

With the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or [USMCA](#), in crucial ratification stages, there are [numerous dynamics](#) – foreign and domestic, political and economic – that could derail the process. The Canada-U.S. [energy relationship](#), similar to the trade relationship, is characterized by a high degree of [integration](#). Canada is the United States' largest source of imported oil and 99% of Canadian export

oil is sold to the United States (at a significant discount). Reliable, low-cost energy is a source of strength for both countries, but secure supply chains are affected by myriad regulatory, infrastructure, and security issues. These concerns will be a focus of attention in 2019 and beyond.



3

The Border that Binds

The 5,500-mile U.S.-Canadian border is not fortified with barbed wire and bricks, but neither is it “undefended,” as some believe. Rather, the U.S. northern border exemplifies a global best practice of cooperative border management. Changing threats and technologies demand constant upgrades to border security. At the same time, more than a million dollars in [two-way trade](#) crosses the border every minute, and the fourth-largest U.S. airport, when

ranked by number of U.S. passengers, is, in fact, Toronto's Pearson Airport. Beyond cooperative [border security](#), the U.S. and Canada have shared interests in the defense of the North America, from synergies in law enforcement and cybersecurity to modernization of the 60-year-old NORAD joint command. What will the new year have in store for cooperation across the dividing line?

3 things to watch: CHINA 19



1

Global U.S.-China Relations

The United States and China are engaged in a worldwide competition to influence security architectures, trading regimes, norms and practices, and values systems. Both nations believe that innovation has become the key to developing the kinds of hard, soft, and economic power they seek and both are using their laboratories, financial power, and standard-setting capacity to shape emerging technologies such as AI, quantum physics, the internet of things, robotics, and bio-engineering. As a result of global competition, the measure of U.S.-China relations is






now taken not only in Beijing and Washington, but in Lima, Nairobi, Moscow, Athens, the Arctic Sea, outer space, and cyberspace. How Washington and Beijing [adjust to each other's moves](#), and to what extent a [balance is struck](#) between competition and cooperation, is the overarching dynamic to watch. More specifically, the Sino-Russia entente; Eurasian connectivity, particularly via the Belt and Road Initiative; and China's efforts to build influence through investment in Africa and [Latin America](#) will be potent topics in the year ahead.

Featured Experts:

[Robert Daly](#), Director, Kissinger Institute on China and the United States

[J. Stapleton Roy](#), Founding Director Emeritus and Distinguished Scholar, Kissinger Institute on China and the United States

[Abraham Denmark](#), Director, Asia Program and Senior Fellow, Kissinger Institute on China and the United States

-  www.wilsoncenter.org/kicus
-  china@wilsoncenter.org
-  facebook.com/KissingerInstitute
-  [@KissingerInst](https://twitter.com/KissingerInst)
-  202.691.4038





2

The Challenge to American Higher Education

The influence of the PPRC is increasingly felt in American communities and institutions, and in [colleges and universities](#) in particular. The 2017 National Security Strategy named American universities as vectors for the loss of strategically vital information to China. Not only is the threat of university-based espionage said to be rising, even normal research and teaching activities that involve Chinese students and scholars are now seen in Washington as suspect. There are vigorous debates in government and in academia about [how](#)

[serious the threat really is](#) and what can be done to counter it without threatening core American values. Limiting the work of Chinese scholars would cut the United States off from the global flow of talent and would threaten the openness which makes the higher educational system a national asset. Now that China is a wealthy peer competitor, the question of how to balance the American imperatives of security, prosperity, and openness is at the center of U.S.-China relations.



3

Rivalries, Hard and Soft

With the United States' declaration of a "free and open Indo-Pacific" and [withdrawal](#) from the INF Treaty, and Beijing's military buildup and assertiveness throughout the Western Pacific, bilateral military competition will play a critical role in the coming year. Both sides are fielding sophisticated new military capabilities. Operations in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea raise the potential for crisis. As the [broader relationship](#) between the United States and China deteriorates, both nations'

ability to manage a [military crisis](#) peacefully may be constrained. The competition in the soft-power and ideological spheres is nearly as intense. China seeks to "tell its story" to the world so that other countries might accept its practices and legitimize the values that underlie them. The U.S. is refining "America first" to more actively promote free markets and open societies. Tracking the [hard- and soft-power competitions](#), and the complex relationships between them, are key in 2019.

things to watch: ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE AND SECURITY



1

Great-Power Competition – for Minerals

The 2018 U.S. National Defense Strategy describes great-power competition as the country's most important defense challenge. The U.S. has historically been the largest global economy, with correspondingly high natural resource consumption. However, Chinese consumption is catching up and the country has become America's [key competitor](#) for resources. Both countries are expected to increase their demand, particularly for minerals used in new technologies. Most technology across civil and military sectors today depends on [rare minerals](#), and they are critical to the information-age economy. Expect increased pressure on already tight supplies,






and as a result, a new competitive space for great powers. China has the comparative advantage over the United States where 13 important minerals are concerned, including nine for which the country is a leading supplier to the United States. America has the upper hand with 8 minerals, but is only a dominant producer of one. Both countries are highly dependent on 11 minerals that are mostly produced in the [DRC, Rwanda, South Africa, Chile, and Brazil](#). Effective, sustainable governance of the production of these resources and America's relationships within these new competitive contexts will be key to ensuring continued resource security.

Featured Experts:

[Lauren Herzer Risi](#), Project Director, Environmental Change and Security Program

[Michael Sfraga](#), Director, Global Sustainability and Resilience Program; Director, Polar Institute

[Sherri Goodman](#), Senior Fellow, Environmental Change and Security Program/Global Women's Leadership Initiative/Polar Institute

 <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/ecsp>
 ecsp@wilsoncenter.org
 [facebook.com/ecspwwc](https://www.facebook.com/ecspwwc)
 [@newsecuritybeat](https://twitter.com/newsecuritybeat)
 202.691.4000





2

Extreme Weather: The Prediction Imperative

Extreme water and weather events pose critical security risks to the U.S. homeland and global stability. From [destabilizing droughts in Africa](#) to [devastating hurricanes](#) across the United States, not only are the frequency and severity of these events increasing, but so too are their physical, social, and economic impacts. Expect more examples of this trend to accumulate. Extreme weather events can also multiply the impact of other complex threats, producing shocks, stresses, or “black swan” events. Many so-called [climate “hotspots”](#) around the world

[demonstrate fragility](#) and lack of capacity in addressing water scarcity and reduced soil quality. As noted in Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere, water disruptions can act as a [“threat multiplier”](#) for political instability and civil conflict. While some water stresses are not predictable by any forecasting system, and while several mechanisms and specific contexts contribute to the outcomes, there is an acute need for high-level quantitative and qualitative assessments and predictive information. Will the coming year see an increased focus on proactive steps?



3

The Future of Water Security

There are three critical aspects to [maintaining water security](#) in the United States: the need to store more water; [recycle more water](#); and think more systematically about flood risk. Storing water will be necessary to smooth out extremes, buffer against shortages, and replace natural storage, as [snowpacks and ice are hit by climate change](#). Recycling more water will increase supply and reduce the energy and conservation costs of the current system. Thinking more systematically about flood risks is essential in the face of extreme, intensifying weather events. This is acutely

felt in the coastal cities and towns facing double exposure – intense storms from the sea and higher sea levels as well as risks from flash flooding caused by heavy rainfall (e.g. Hurricane Harvey). While climate change is a driver of water insecurity, it is not the only one; increased demand for water, paired with decreases and volatility of supply, the economics of water, and aging infrastructure are all risks. The year ahead provides an opportunity to address them, while particular attention must be paid to the social and ecological impacts of policies and projects.

3 things to watch: GLOBAL WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP



1

The Women's Wave

There are 131 women members of the 116th Congress, or 24% of the total – [a record high](#). In addition, the incoming members are the most diverse in terms of ethnicity, age, and background. The 2018 wave is considered more permanent than its 1992 predecessor in that more women won seats in Congress. Women won 62% of the seats flipped by the Democratic Party; and new PACS and groups have organized to highlight and push for more women and diversity in Congress (Democracy in Color, Higher Heights, Winning for

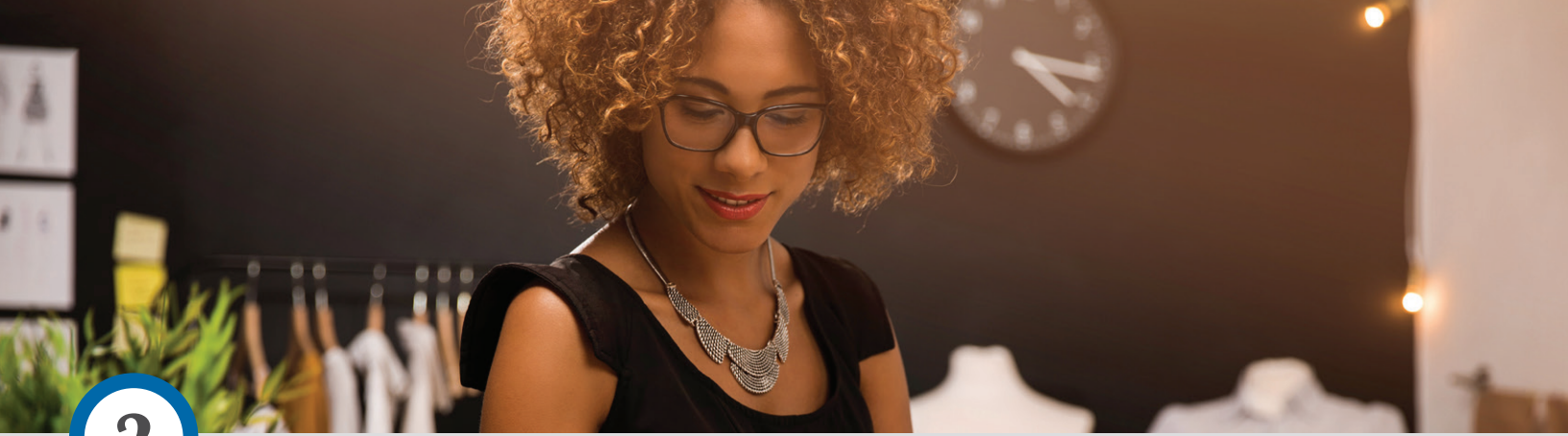
Women, VIEW PAC, ReflectUS, the Orange Book, RunForOffice, and others). The speaker of the House is a woman and two women head the House Appropriations Committee. This leadership in Congress tracks a rise in interest in [women's leadership](#) at the city and state level across the U.S. In 2019, a key dynamic will be if and how women are able to rise through all parties, including the Republican Party, and if they continue to serve multiple terms within the Republican Party.

Featured Expert:

[Gwen K. Young](#), Director, Global Women's Leadership Initiative Index and Women in Public Service Project

-  www.wilsoncenter.org/program/global-womens-leadership-initiative
-  WPSP@wilsoncenter.org
-  facebook.com/WPSProject
-  [@WPSProject](https://twitter.com/WPSProject)
-  202.691.4366





2

Finance is Female

In early 2019, the White House and State Department are expected to hold a summit to announce the administration’s strategy on global women’s economic empowerment. The announcement follows a series of high-level commitments to economic advancement for women. In 2017, Ivanka Trump and the World Bank launched the [We-Fi](#) fund and initiative designed to unlock financing for women entrepreneurs. This commitment to open-

ing up financing for women-owned businesses is coupled with discussions about impact investing and gender-smart investing projects and summits sponsored by banks such as UBS. According to a [2016 McKinsey report](#), global GDP would grow by 12-28 trillion USD if women were fully employed. A key in the new year will be the extent to which this potential – and the administration’s commitments – are realized, and what the practical effects will be.



3

Toward Parity in Government

[Women leaders](#) have a positive impact on governance, economic growth, gender equality, and inclusive, sustainable development. When institutions include women in their leadership, they tend to improve the honesty, transparency, fairness, inclusivity, and empathy of the workplace as well as the output of the institution. In 2019, the global commitment to women’s leadership will remain strong. In government, while women leaders such as Angela Merkel of Germany are stepping down, women such as Margot Wallstrom of Sweden and Chrystia Freeland of Canada are leading in foreign affairs and defense.

Countries are demonstrating their commitment to gender equity: France, Spain, and Canada have made firm commitments, achieved gender equity in their cabinets, and called for parliamentary equity. A woman is chief of the military forces in Slovenia and NATO has developed its [action plan](#) for more women’s leadership at [the alliance’s](#) headquarters and also in militaries. In the year ahead, eyes will be on efforts to achieve gender parity in government and whether positive trends in some areas and places can extend to others.

things to watch: KOREA



Uncertainty and Danger on the Korean Peninsula

President Trump insists that negotiations with North Korea over denuclearization are on track and that he will meet for a second summit with Kim Jong Un early this year – despite signs that negotiations have [reached a standstill](#). Indeed, since the historic Singapore summit in June 2018, Pyongyang has called for the lifting of sanctions, while Washington demands “fully verified, irreversible” denuclearization as a prerequisite. South Korean President Moon Jae-in, meanwhile, is poised to hold a fourth summit with Kim, this time in Seoul,

as the two Koreas step up inter-Korean reconciliation and push for a lifting of mutual sanctions. In early 2019, watch for whether U.S. and North Korean officials will be able to get negotiations back on track, signified by another summit, and whether the apparent gap between Seoul and Washington widens on a timeline and sequencing for denuclearization and the lifting of sanctions. The risk: a return to past tensions and provocations and a potentially explicit break in the U.S.-ROK alliance.

Featured Expert:

[Jean H. Lee](#), Director, Hyundai Motor-Korea Foundation Center for Korean History and Public Policy

🌐 www.wilsoncenter.org/Koreacenter
✉ KoreaCenter@wilsoncenter.org
🐦 [@korea_center](https://twitter.com/korea_center)
☎ 202.691.4016

NUCLEAR STUDIES



The Future of the Iran Nuclear Deal

In May, the Trump administration withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal, or the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), on the grounds that this discrete nuclear agreement did not encompass Iran's malign regional activities, address ballistic missiles, or prevent the country's acquisition of nuclear weapons in perpetuity. The International Atomic Energy Agency reports that Iran remains in compliance with its obligations under the deal. The White House has unsuccessfully pressed Britain, France, and Germany to join in withdrawing from the JCPOA and re-imposing economic sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

The fallout from this sequence of events will continue to play out in the year ahead: The U.S. threat to impose sanctions on foreign firms continuing to conduct business with Iran could lead to a trade dispute between Washington and its major partners. Though the regime is adept at circumventing sanctions, the U.S. effort to impose a global oil boycott on Tehran could lead it to reconsider continued observance of the JCPOA.

[Robert Litwak](#), Senior Vice President and Director of International Security Studies

HISTORY AND PUBLIC POLICY



Those Who Do Not Learn from History...

The year ahead in U.S. foreign policy and world affairs presents daunting challenges. Opportunities for progress, too, abound. In helping the policy community prepare, the Wilson Center relies on one of its great strengths – the ability to help leverage lessons from the past. The History and Public Policy Program will continue to expand and study its remarkable [collection of archival materials](#) – from previously unpublished diplomatic correspondence on nuclear crises to primary sources on the Cold War – to better inform analysis and decisions today.

Featured Experts:

[Christian F. Ostermann](#), Director, History and Public Policy Program

[Charles Kraus](#), Senior Program Associate, History and Public Policy Program

🌐 <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/program/history-and-public-policy-program>

✉ historyandpublicpolicyprogram@wilsoncenter.org

📞 202.691.4079

things to watch: LATIN AMERICA



1

Venezuela's Plunge

In January 2019, events in Venezuela unfolded at a dizzying pace. President Nicolás Maduro was sworn in for a second term, following elections condemned around the world as illegitimate. Then, the chosen leader of the outlawed, opposition-controlled National Assembly, Juan Guaidó, declared himself interim president. The U.S. and other major countries of the hemisphere moved quickly to recognize Guaidó. To increase pressure on the regime and in an effort to hasten a democratic transition, the Trump administration imposed sanctions on the ailing and corrupt state-run

oil company, PdVSA. But key allies of the Venezuelan government – [Russia](#), [China](#), Cuba, Turkey, and others – stood firm in support of Maduro. Meanwhile, Venezuela remains mired in a deep economic and humanitarian crisis which has caused [the exodus](#) of some 3 million people. There are numerous [possible scenarios](#) in the coming months, from regime change to regime consolidation to superpower competition over a struggling nation. The year 2019 will stand out as one of the most consequential in Venezuela's history.

Featured Experts:

[Cynthia Arnson](#), Director, Latin American Program

[Benjamin Gedan](#), Senior Advisor, Latin American Program and Director, Argentina Project

<http://www.wilsoncenter.org/lap>
lap@wilsoncenter.org
[facebook.com/LatinAmericanProgram](https://www.facebook.com/LatinAmericanProgram)
[@LATAMProg](https://twitter.com/LATAMProg)
[202.691.4075](tel:202.691.4075)



2

Central American Exodus

U.S. Customs and Border Protection apprehended more than 60,000 people at the U.S.-Mexico border in both October and November, compared to a monthly average of 43,000 over the last fiscal year. Given conditions in the Northern Triangle countries of [Guatemala](#), Honduras, and El Salvador, there is no reason to expect a significant decline in migration in 2019. Public attention to the Northern Triangle spiked in 2014, amid a surge in unaccompanied minors arriving in the United States, and again in 2018, as a result of [migrant caravans](#) that formed ahead of the U.S. midterm elections.

However, the drivers of migration – gang violence, poverty, and poor governance – are longstanding and show few signs of improvement in the near term. The U.S. has made [commitments](#) to invest in economic development, security reform, and public institutions to reduce migration. These investments make sense, but will take time to meaningfully improve the quality of life in Central America. Meanwhile, the turmoil in [Nicaragua](#) shows no signs of abating, and as the regime of President Daniel Ortega digs in its heels, this will be a crisis to watch in 2019.



3

More Chinese Inroads

The Trump administration's strategy of limiting [Chinese engagement](#) in Latin America will be tested repeatedly in 2019, as Beijing markets its Belt and Road Initiative to governments hungry for external financing for infrastructure projects. Indeed, Latin American countries [view China](#) primarily through an economic lens, not the security framework privileged by the U.S. administration: Recent elections have installed conservative leaders in Chile, Colombia, and Brazil, leaving Latin America with few leftist leaders with ideological sympathies with Beijing. Nevertheless,

center-right presidents such as Argentina's Mauricio Macri have found Chinese loans irresistible. Despite warnings from Vice President Pence and Secretary of State Pompeo, Argentina arranged a state visit for Xi Jinping following the Buenos Aires G20 summit and announced more than 30 bilateral agreements. In the year ahead, the U.S. might also find itself struggling to safeguard Taiwan's dwindling contingent of diplomatic partners, following [the decisions](#) by Panama, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador to establish relations with China in 2017-18.

3 things to watch: MEXICO



1

AMLO vs. Corruption and Criminals

Mexico is embarking on a new path under the presidency of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, or AMLO, who has promised to move the country away from neoliberalism and to embrace a more nationalistic, socially just future. He campaigned on an [anti-corruption platform](#), which was ambitious yet perilously short on detail. The new president has stated that he would rather not prosecute corrupt individuals from previous governments, but instead adopt a forward-looking approach focused on his own. Will this top-down approach be realized – and successful – in the year ahead? Corruption






is only part of the story, however; Mexican voters are deeply and justifiably concerned about [public insecurity](#) and the influence of organized crime. Thus far, AMLO’s team has presented a national security strategy that offers little in the way of innovative solutions, and the number of homicides in Mexico in 2018 [promises to be the highest](#) on record. If AMLO cannot bring down [homicides](#), and if corruption continues to ravage the country, then his popularity will likely suffer by the end of 2019.

Featured Experts:

[Duncan Wood](#), Director, Mexico Institute

[Christopher Wilson](#), Deputy Director, Mexico Institute

[Earl Anthony Wayne](#), Public Policy Fellow, Mexico Institute

-  www.wilsoncenter.org/mexico
-  mexico@wilsoncenter.org
-  facebook.com/MexicoInstitute
-  [@MexicoInstitute](https://twitter.com/MexicoInstitute)
-  202.691.4325





2

Fueling Mexico

The [landmark reform](#) of the administration of Enrique Peña Nieto was a constitutional change that allowed private and foreign investment in the country's oil, gas, and electricity sectors. Though [international observers](#) and the energy industry [see the reform as a huge success](#), generating massive investment in the sector and promising to turn around Mexico's long-term decline in oil production, AMLO and his policy team are vehemently opposed. Though they have promised to

repeal the constitutional reform itself, there are plans to radically alter the secondary or implementing laws to focus efforts on the national oil company, Pemex, and the national electricity utility, CFE. The new government has already canceled future bidding rounds for oil blocks as well as auctions for generating capacity. Expect this trend to continue in 2019, to the long-term detriment of the Mexican energy sector.



3

Mounting U.S.-Mexico Tensions?

Although AMLO and President Trump have maintained cordial, respectful relations since the former was elected last July, tensions may mount in 2019. The combination of ongoing pressure from Trump on the U.S. Congress to allow [funding for a border wall](#) and on [Mexico to do more](#) to stem migrant flows from Central America (with a potential surge in migration in the summer of 2019) could bring about a less measured response from AMLO. If

that is the case, we could see a rapid deterioration of his personal relationship with Trump. Much depends on the success of current efforts to forge [U.S.-Mexico collaboration](#) on Central American development; if the U.S. is willing to [invest huge sums](#) in the region, then Mexico may well agree to continue cooperating on controlling migrant flows through its territory.

things to watch: MIDDLE EAST



1

Trump's Ultimate Peace Deal

Sometime early this year, the administration may present its much-anticipated Israeli-Palestinian peace plan. The document is reportedly 40 pages in length and purports to be a comprehensive plan to resolve the conflict – something [no administration](#) has proposed before. The plan has a heavy focus on the [economic dimension](#), aimed at improving the lives of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza,

but it also addresses final-status issues. Expectations are low, given the administration's steps in recent months to pressure the Palestinians, including opening an embassy in Jerusalem, reprogramming West Bank aid, and defunding UNRWA. The most likely outcome will be an Israel "yes, but"; an Arab-state "maybe"; and a Palestinian "no."

Featured Experts:

[Aaron David Miller](#), Vice President, Wilson Center and Director, Middle East Program

[David Ottaway](#), Middle East Fellow

[Robin Wright](#), USIP-Wilson Center Distinguished Fellow

 www.wilsoncenter.org/middleeast

 mep@wilsoncenter.org

 facebook.com/WilsonCenterMEP

 [@WilsonCenterMEP](https://twitter.com/WilsonCenterMEP)

 202.691.4000





2

The U.S. and the Kingdom

The [Saudi murder](#) of *Washington Post* columnist and U.S. resident Jamal Khashoggi has presented the bilateral relationship with its greatest crisis since 9/11. His killing, however, represents [the most recent example](#) of a relationship that has drifted out of control, largely because of impulsive actions of the young, inexperienced, and ambitious Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman. The kidnaping of the Lebanese prime minister, the boycott of Qatar, and the disastrous Saudi air campaign

in Yemen have undermined both U.S. interests and values. It's not yet clear whether the crown prince's powers will be enhanced or contained, but given the importance the administration attaches to Saudi Arabia in its regional strategy, this dynamic is definitely one to watch. Congress – seemingly determined to impose some measure of accountability on bin Salman – will likely be the catalyst for action.



3

Israeli Elections and a Netanyahu Indictment?

Elections in Israel are due to be held no later than November, but most analysts believe that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will call them earlier, perhaps this spring. None of the parties in the governing coalition now seem interested in an early election, largely because there is no compelling reason to advance them, and there's great uncertainty about whether they would strengthen or weaken the coalition's control of Knesset seats. Still, the prime minister may chance them to try to

strengthen his own hand in advance of what could be an indictment by the attorney general on bribery and corruption charges, which is expected within the next six months. In July, Netanyahu will surpass David Ben-Gurion as Israel's longest-serving prime minister – and part of his staying power is the lack of viable alternatives, and even his adversaries' uncertainties, about who or what would succeed him.

3 things to watch: POLAR 19



1

A Landscape in Flux

The polar regions are experiencing rapid environmental, social, political, and economic change. The most pronounced changes are occurring in the Arctic, which is warming at more than twice the rate exhibited elsewhere on Earth. A new ocean is opening and, for the United States, a fourth open and accessible coast is emerging in Alaska. The eight Arctic nations – the U.S., Russia, Canada, Denmark/Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Finland – face diverse challenges and opportunities: the impacts of eroding coastline






and landscapes that threaten [local communities](#); increased [economic activities](#), such as shipping and extractive industries; maritime issues, such as the future [management of marine resources](#) in the Central Arctic Ocean; and more. The year ahead is a critical window of opportunity to continue studying the range of new dynamics – and to make progress on forging holistic and sustainable strategies to address them.

Featured Experts

[Michael Sfraga](#), Director, Global Sustainability and Resilience Program; Director, Polar Institute

[David Balton](#), Senior Fellow, Polar Institute

[Jim Townsend](#), Global Fellow, Polar Institute

-  www.wilsoncenter.org/polar
-  polar@wilsoncenter.org
-  facebook.com/thepolarinitiative
-  @polarinitiative
-  202.691.4002





2

New Security Imperatives

The United States is an Arctic nation – with all of the inherent national-security concerns that come with this status. Although international, consensus-driven frameworks such as the Arctic Council exist to discuss and act on a broad array of environmental and scientific matters, the realities of [today’s global Arctic](#) require increasing attention be given to [national security](#). Several reports and related strategies have been developed by the Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security (U.S. Coast Guard), and the Department

of Commerce (NOAA). A few specific strategies related to national security are now being revised or developed. Amid growing concern about the capacity of the U.S. to effectively project force in the Far North, expect attention to be paid to a more “whole-of-government” approach to the region – a more integrated [DoD](#), Homeland Security, and Commerce (NOAA) strategy that better leverages existing assets and which demonstrates the need for additional resources to counter the growing Arctic presence of Russia and China.



3

Great Powers in the Far North

Arctic competition between the U.S., Russia, and China will continue to play out in the year ahead. Russian President Putin has made clear that the country’s future is [inextricably tied](#) to the development of its vast stores of Arctic natural resources, demonstrated by the development of its Yamal Peninsula LNG field and a significant accumulation of military assets along the Northern Sea Route. China continues to play a central role in the Yamal complex, which it envisions as [an expansion](#) of the Belt and Road Initiative and a demonstration of its status as a self-declared “near-Arctic

state.” Russia’s economic expansion is paired with an increase in military activities throughout the Scandinavian and Baltic regions. In response, NATO recently conducted one of its largest exercises in years, and the U.S. reactivated the 2nd Fleet. Meanwhile, [Greenland](#) is geographically and geopolitically important to the Western alliance, while China has offered the territory much-needed investment dollars. These separate but [linked economic and military activities](#) in the Arctic come in the context of similar activities worldwide.

things to watch: RUSSIA & UKRAINE



1

U.S.-Russia Nuclear Arms Control

Two arms-control issues to watch in 2019 are developments in the aftermath of the [U.S. withdrawal](#) from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) and the potential release of the Trump administration's Ballistic Missile Defense Review (BMDR). In July 2014, the U.S. [declared Russia](#) in violation of the INF Treaty for testing and producing the SSC-8 missile. After years of trying to bring the Russian government back into compliance, the U.S. announced its intent to withdraw on February 1. The BMDR is likely to be the next arms-control-related issue

to garner attention, as reports indicate it will set ambitious new targets for BMD systems that are likely to be of concern for Russia, China, and others. Finally, do not expect any definitive developments regarding the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START). A more likely scenario is a new bargain perceived by the administration as more advantageous to the U.S. However, given the rapidly approaching expiration date in 2021, we should not expect substantial movement in the near future.

Featured Experts:

[Matthew Rojansky](#), Director, Kennan Institute

[William Pomeranz](#), Deputy Director, Kennan Institute

[Mykhailo Minakov](#), Senior Advisor, Editor-in-Chief, *Focus Ukraine* blog, Kennan Institute

 www.wilsoncenter.org/kennan

 kennan@wilsoncenter.org

 facebook.com/Kennan.Institute

 [@kennaninstitute](https://twitter.com/kennaninstitute)

 202.691.4100





2

Ukraine at the Polls

Ukraine enters 2019 with continued armed conflict in Donbas, martial law in 10 of 25 oblasts, and [rapidly approaching](#) presidential and parliamentary elections. As of now, the major presidential contenders look to be [Yulia Tymoshenko](#) and President Petro Poroshenko. No matter the outcome, Ukraine will likely continue in its westward orientation and push forward on socioeconomic reforms, while coping with rising debt payments. The result will likely influence the direction of parliamentary election results in the fall, where groups alternatively pro-Western, self-isolating, and pro-Russian

will compete for the sympathies of Ukrainians dealing with growing security and economic hardships. It appears likely that the self-isolation and pro-Western parties will hold on to their majority, but pro-Russian groups may increase their presence, forcing the government to take into account their demands. Another critical factor will be the [situation in Donbas](#), where a spike in tensions may provide the president and radical groups with an additional electoral boost. These same tensions, however, could lead to military actions, resulting in the postponement of elections.



3

Disinformation Digs In

The Oxford Internet Institute recently concluded that the quantity of “junk news” shared online during the 2018 midterm elections was greater than in 2016, despite higher scrutiny and [public awareness](#) about disinformation. We should expect to see more of the same in 2019, with the Russian online influence playbook cracked open for all manner of operations, both foreign and homegrown, to replicate. As the 2020 election cycle begins, the stakes will be high for cyberattacks that might fuel disinformation campaigns. We should expect bad actors to game the system, using workarounds on

[social media platforms](#) to achieve maximum amplification of their political content without purchasing a single ad. Similarly, [foreign actors](#) have already shown that they are savvier than in 2016, and are more effectively masking their behavior online. We should not expect poor English or ads paid in rubles this time around; the foreign disinformation targeting us in 2019 will be stealthier and sleeker than what we have seen before, aided by an ever-growing ecosystem of malign content on the internet.

3 things to watch: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



1

AI Attacks and Imperatives

Continued advances in artificial intelligence (AI) will solidify the technology as both a vital strategic asset for the U.S. – as an economic engine across nearly all sectors and as a tool of national defense – as well as a significant liability from a security perspective. In 2019, we will see a significant technical leap in the sophistication and scope of cyberattacks due to the integration of AI into malicious actors’ arsenals. At the same time, defenders will increasingly rely on AI systems to bolster their defenses. The [challenges and solutions](#) that AI presents for cybersecurity clearly demonstrate

[its dual-use potential](#). On the international level, in the absence of clear U.S. leadership on the issue, allies and strategic competitors, alike, have begun to fill the void, publicly expressing their visions for AI in national strategies. The U.S. still maintains an advantage in the field of AI research and development, but risks falling behind and losing its voice at the table to set the international norms. Will the U.S. step forward and take a more active role in this dialogue, a process that should begin with the development of a national AI strategy?

Featured Experts:

[Meg King](#), Strategic and National Security Advisor to the Wilson Center’s President and Director, Digital Futures Project

[Anne Bowser](#), Director of Innovation, Science and Technology Innovation Program

[Benjamin Buchanan](#), Global Fellow, Digital Futures Project

- 🌐 www.wilsoncenter.org/program/science-and-technology-innovation-program
- ✉ stip@wilsoncenter.org
- 📘 facebook.com/WilsonSTIP
- 🐦 [@WilsonSTIP](https://twitter.com/WilsonSTIP)
- 📞 202.691.4398





2

Citizens Powering Science

Challenges that are global in scale require holistic strategies to combat them. A diversity of information sources is key for better understanding and improved policy. Individual citizens will play an increasingly important role in helping to democratize research and scientific efforts toward solutions to such global issues. Projects such as [Earth Challenge 2020](#) highlight the type of citizen engagement that can be used. A partnership between the Wilson Center, Earth Day Network, and the U.S.

Department of State's Green Diplomacy Initiative, it is the world's largest coordinated [citizen-science campaign](#). It engages millions of people around the world to collect and aggregate more than one billion data points in areas including air quality, water quality, biodiversity, pollution, and human health. Look for this and related initiatives to increasingly inspire collaborative action and influence policy decisions.



3






The Diffusion of Offensive Cyber

In traditional realms of conflict, cost, access to infrastructure, and necessary technical expertise all present barriers high enough to make it difficult for non-state actors to pose legitimate threats to nation-state powers. Initially, this paradigm seemed to hold true for the cyber domain as well. And while the threat posed by Russia, North Korea, Iran, and China persists, traditional diplomatic channels, rules of engagement, and the threat of a kinetic military or punitive economic response reduces the risk of a catastrophic cyberattack on the United States. However, we are

witnessing a continued [diffusion of cyber capabilities](#) to a much broader, less disciplined set of actors. This diffusion is the result of: the purposeful outsourcing of cyber operations by some state actors to non-government entities to create a shroud of plausible deniability; poor protection of key digital tools; and sophisticated monitoring and mimicking of the tactics used by state actors, which are commoditized [on the dark web](#). The danger posed by non-traditional actors who are less easily restrained by traditional levers of control is an evolving reality.



One Woodrow Wilson Plaza
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20004-3027

-  www.wilsoncenter.org
-  wwics@wilsoncenter.org
-  [facebook.com/woodrowwilsoncenter](https://www.facebook.com/woodrowwilsoncenter)
-  [@thewilsoncenter](https://twitter.com/thewilsoncenter)
-  202.691.4000

Aaron C. Jones

Director of Congressional Relations

Aaron.Jones@wilsoncenter.org
202.691.4140