

Synthèse - Do we live in a post-American world ? / Is the world witnessing the wane of American global leadership ?

Read these two articles and write your answer (350 words +/- 10%):

Document 1: American power is being stretched abroad and undermined at home

By Anton La Guardia, *The Economist* Nov 13th 2023

WHEN JOE BIDEN entered the White House his priority was to establish “a stable, predictable relationship” with Russia and end America’s “forever wars” in the greater Middle East, to concentrate on the economy at home and rivalry with China abroad. It did not work out that way. Russia invaded Ukraine; Hamas attacked Israel. As America helps its friends under assault, can it still defend Taiwan?

Strategists worry about a “window of vulnerability” in the Indo-Pacific this decade, as China’s forces grow stronger and America’s investments in new military equipment don’t fully bear fruit until the 2030s. Concerns about this gap will deepen with the approach of 2027, the year when Xi Jinping, China’s leader, wants the People’s Liberation Army to be able to invade Taiwan if ordered to do so. But whether a war breaks out does not just depend on the military balance. Much will be determined by politics. And with both America and Taiwan holding elections in 2024, the danger period may start soon.

Despite talk of America’s decline, it remains a military colossus, accounting for 39% of global defence spending at market exchange rates. But as Australia’s defence strategic review concluded in April 2023, “The United States is no longer the unipolar leader of the Indo-Pacific.” The changing balance places a premium¹ on America’s unparalleled network of alliances. Mr Biden has worked hard at repairing the damage to this network wrought by his predecessor, Donald Trump. NATO has united, expanded and rallied to support Ukraine.

Asian allies have helped, too. There is no NATO in the Indo-Pacific, but Japan is sharply boosting defence spending and America is building up its presence in Australia. It is also weaving a “lattice-work²” of ad hoc³ partnerships. These include the AUKUS deal with Britain to supply Australia with nuclear-powered submarines and jointly develop other weapons; a defence-industrial deal with India to produce jet engines; and the Philippines’ agreement to grant America access to several bases. Expect America to add more such strands in 2024.

Much depends on the perception of America’s credibility and capacity. On credibility, critics of Mr Biden believe America’s pell-mell⁴ departure from Afghanistan in 2021 signalled weakness to America’s foes. Similarly, others contend that cutting aid to Ukraine would grant a victory not just to Russia but to China, too. As for capacity, the Pentagon long ago abandoned the requirement that its armed forces be able to fight two major regional wars simultaneously. Instead it now seeks to “deter and, if necessary, prevail in conflict” against a major adversary, while also being able to “deter opportunistic aggression elsewhere”.

In Europe Mr Biden has helped Ukraine without sending American forces, and deployed more units to Europe to deter attacks on NATO. In the Middle East, he sent two aircraft-carrier strike groups to the region, and strengthened other forces, to deter attacks by Iran and its proxies⁵.

¹ **To place (/ put) a premium on** = to put great importance on

² **Lattice-work** : treillage (entrelacs -> réseau)

³ **Ad hoc** : ponctuel, de circonstance

⁴ **Pell-mell** : désordonné, précipité

⁵ **A proxy** : un mandataire, ici un pays qui agit au nom d’un autre plus puissant dont il est proche

On the face of it, supporting friends is a cheaper way to preserve American power than direct involvement in wars, as in Iraq and Afghanistan. But American defence firms are struggling to boost production to supply allies while replenishing depleted American stocks. War games suggest America would run out of long-range anti-ship missiles within days of a war with China over⁶ Taiwan. “We have a one-war military and a two-week industrial base,” notes Kori Schake of the American Enterprise Institute, a think-tank.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to sustaining America’s role in the world is political dysfunction at home. “America first” Republicans have hampered normal budgeting and have grown especially hostile to funding the war in Ukraine. If they succeed in cutting aid to Ukraine in 2024, allies everywhere will shudder—doubly so if their champion, Mr Trump, is again elected president. ■

Document 2 : Biden’s Allies Say the Quiet Part Out Loud: This War Could Be His 2024 Reset

By Michael Hirsh, *Politico*, 10/20/2023

For Sen. Chris Coons, one of President Joe Biden’s closest allies in Washington, the president’s wartime mission to the Middle East and Republican dysfunction in Washington — all of it happening at the same time — offered the starkest of split-screens⁷. In an interview with POLITICO Magazine, Coons was emphatic that Biden’s lightning-fast trip to Israel was *not* about the 2024 election. But in the same breath, Coons laid out in lavish⁸ detail just how telling⁹ it was that while Biden was in Tel Aviv assuring the Israelis that America had their backs¹⁰, the GOP¹¹ was literally falling apart on Capitol Hill.

“The contrast with Republicans could not be sharper,” Coons (D-Del.), a co-chair of Biden’s re-election campaign, said Wednesday. He then rattled off¹² a well-honed¹³ critique of GOP disarray¹⁴: how a paralyzed House of Representatives can no longer function on critical issues like aid to Israel and Ukraine; how former President Donald Trump’s comments praising Hezbollah as “very smart” and criticizing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu just hours after the deaths of more than 1,400 Israelis were strongly denounced by presidential contenders former Vice President Mike Pence and former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie and other Republicans; and how American voters will come to realize, at such a dangerous moment, they can’t afford an “erratic” president “who’s a disruptor.” (...)

The president’s political advisers are not oblivious to those dynamics. They are leery¹⁵ of appearing to politicize the Middle East crisis with the lives of American and Israeli hostages at stake, but in multiple conversations with key figures in Biden world, both on and off the record, it becomes clear they see the opportunity presented by an unexpected crisis to feature Biden’s strengths. (...)

In some ways Wednesday’s historic visit and Thursday’s Oval Office address could be viewed as a kind of reopening of Biden’s already troubled re-election campaign. Above all, the 80-year-old Biden is trying to change the narrative on what has become his biggest liability, his age, which polls have shown may be the top concern of both Democratic and Republican voters. The internet is rife¹⁶ with memes and clips of Biden shuffling¹⁷, falling and misspeaking¹⁸. His campaign wants to turn that vulnerability into a strength by arguing

⁶ **Over** = about

⁷ **The starkest of split-screens** : *des écrans divisés à l’extrême (= une image très nettement coupée en deux)*

⁸ **In lavish detail** : *avec moult détails*

⁹ **Telling** : *révélateur*

¹⁰ **Had their backs** = supported them

¹¹ **The GOP** = the Grand Old Party (the Republican Party)

¹² **To rattle off** : *débiter (à toute vitesse)*

¹³ **Well-honed** : *affûtée, bien réfléchie*

¹⁴ **Disarray** : *désarroi, désordre, confusion*

¹⁵ **To be leery of doing sthg** : *ne pas vouloir faire qqch (par méfiance)*

¹⁶ **To be rife with** = to be full of / filled with

¹⁷ **To shuffle** : *(ici) traîner des pieds*

¹⁸ **To misspeak** = to make a mistake

that only Biden has the experience and wisdom to handle what is becoming one of the most perilous international landscapes since World War II, campaign aides say.

Nonetheless, the people running his re-election campaign lose no opportunity to argue that Biden's frenetic global diplomacy should belie any concerns about his age. "He just went all around the world to India, led a G-7 summit masterfully, and then went to Vietnam making significant progress," Coons said. All this demonstrates "his ability to travel and project leadership, determination and willpower in person, whether going to Kyiv or Jerusalem, New Delhi or Tokyo," he said. "This is a real leader and I think the American people are not ready to retreat from the world."

That last point remains somewhat at issue, of course. Until recently, it's been clear that Americans are yearning to turn inward and focus on their own problems. Even Biden has embraced certain parts of Trump's America First agenda, especially when it came to taking a neo-protectionist stance on trade.

The question is whether this might be changing. U.S. voters today are mostly focused on inflation, the economy and the culture wars, and foreign policy is typically not a central issue in most presidential elections. Yet on occasion it has been — for example in 1940 when Franklin Roosevelt won an unprecedented third term because of the wars raging in Europe and Asia, despite an America First isolationist atmosphere similar to today's. (...) Foreign policy probably last played a central role in 2004 when, despite former President George W. Bush's many mistakes in Iraq, voters proved reluctant to change leaders in the middle of a war.

The new Middle East crisis comes amid the ongoing Ukraine war and rising Sino-U.S. tensions over Taiwan, along with a growing sense that Beijing, Moscow and Tehran are increasingly aligned against Washington and gloating¹⁹ over Biden's problems at home and abroad. On Wednesday, while Biden was in Tel Aviv, Putin was meeting with Xi in Beijing at China's Belt and Road forum, which was attended by United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres among other leaders. Putin, who sat next to Xi, said such "external factors" as the Middle East crisis only "strengthen Russian-Chinese interaction" while in a statement Xi said "deepening China-Russia relations" are "not a stopgap measure, but a long-term solution." (...)

What it all means is that ironically, even as many Americans are drifting toward a new kind of isolationism, the country now risks getting pulled into wars on three major fronts: Europe, the Asia Pacific and now the Middle East.

"If it looks like he's being pulled into a vortex²⁰, it's going to be disastrous for him. But if he performs well on the world stage, then people may forget about the bumbling²¹ in Afghanistan and want to stick with his leadership," says Sidney Milkis, a scholar of the presidency at the University of Virginia. This could prove especially true of independent voters who are undecided, such as suburban women, he said.

How Biden handles these crises over the next 12 months or so could make a significant difference in the election, political experts say.

¹⁹ **To gloat (over):** *se gausser, exulter, jubiler (à propos de)*

²⁰ **Vortex :** *tourbillon*

²¹ **Bumbling :** *cafouillages*