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The Global Outlook of the Top Five Candidates in the U.S. Presidential Election

Cordelia Buchanan Ponczek

Traditionally, there is a partisan split on foreign policy in the United States: Republican candidates and voters worry more about terrorism, defence and national security than Democratic candidates and voters, thereby putting more stock in foreign policy issues, which manifests itself in the aggressiveness—of lack thereof—of each party’s foreign policy platform. But the candidates in the 2016 U.S. presidential election can be categorised by more than just party: a line can also be drawn between conventional candidates—Hillary Clinton, a Democrat, and Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio, Republicans—and unconventional candidates—Donald Trump, a Republican, and Bernie Sanders, a Democrat. Should a conventional candidate be elected president, U.S. foreign policy would be based on predictable adaptation to the changing international environment. An unconventional candidate, however, would be a wild card, whose actions would be difficult to predict.

Foreign policy is rarely the driving force behind elections in the United States. The 2016 presidential election is proving otherwise. A Pew Research poll from 22 January 2016 shows the economy and terrorism neck and neck as the single most important issue, with both polling at 75% among respondents’ chief concerns.¹ As commander in chief of the world’s largest and strongest army, the next U.S. president will continue to make decisions about war and peace, choose between engagement and isolationism, and determine how to best protect the American people and whether to extend that protection to U.S. allies abroad. For tell-tale signs, one need look no further than the candidates themselves—their ideology, proposed policies, voting records, stump speeches, and interviews.

This election pits two Democratic candidates against each other—Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders—while the Republican Party, which originally sported a host of contenders, has tentatively settled on three key candidates: billionaire real estate mogul Donald J. Trump and U.S. Senators Ted Cruz, from Texas, and Marco Rubio, from Florida.

Four out of the five top contenders are publicly elected officials; this means they bring with them voting records, a history of speeches, and tenable policy that can be weighed against their current statements and proposals. One candidate, Trump, has never served in public office and offers little indication apart from speeches and interviews of what policy he may bring with him. A review of each candidates’ foreign policy credentials and visions helps to mitigate—for leaders and citizens alike—the sense of unpredictability.

¹ “Budget Deficit Slips as Public Priority,” Pew Research, 22 January 2016, www.people-press.org/2016/01/22/budget-deficit-slips-as-public-priority.

Two Democratic Contenders

Hillary Clinton: A Hawkish Democrat

Clinton is the only candidate that brings significant foreign policy experience to the race. Her legacy as the former chief diplomat of the United States from 2009 to 2013 helps voters and onlookers assess her previous policies and form expectations of her possible tenure in office, particularly in how she confronts U.S. engagement abroad. Furthermore, Clinton's time in the U.S. Senate, from 2001 to 2009, also offers a barometer of her policy inclinations.

To voters, Clinton projects herself as knowledgeable of global threats and as a strong leader to aptly address those threats. Under Clinton as president, the U.S. would be engaged abroad, perhaps more so than under President Barack Obama. This is a tough balance for the former secretary of state to strike, as she must show cohesion with President Obama's policies while defining her own strategies to address voter needs and fears.² As such, the primary focus of Clinton's campaign has been on the Middle East, particularly on the ongoing and future U.S. engagement in Syria. Here, Clinton has differentiated herself from her opposition, such as Trump, by declining to cooperate with Russia in the bombing campaign in Syria; in fact, Clinton has signalled little intention of cooperating with Russia on issues other than arms control. With Russia, as in the Middle East, Clinton has a difficult legacy to live down: the failure of the attempt to improve relations with Russia initiated in 2009 through the so-called "reset." Her support of the reset is interesting, given her voting legacy in the Senate: In 2006, then-Senator Clinton sponsored a resolution, S.Res. 526,³ condemning the murder of journalists in Russia; in 2008, after the Russo-Georgian War, she sponsored S. 3567⁴ to investigate the source of tensions between the small South Caucasus country and its northern neighbour—both of which indicate Clinton was aware of the tenuous situation with Russia. Regardless, she seems to have learnt her lesson. Before leaving her position as secretary of state, Clinton first advised President Obama to take a harder line on Russian President Vladimir Putin.⁵ Clinton's policy as a candidate remains consistent with her wariness of Russia. Her rhetoric of late has focused on strengthening NATO to counter Russia's move to establish a "sphere of influence" in places like Ukraine. She has also advocated putting stronger measures in place to punish Russia—and Putin in particular—for its revanchist aggression on NATO's eastern flank.⁶ Clinton has not only been keen to contain Russia but also to expand NATO: in 2008, as senator, Clinton co-sponsored a resolution to support providing Georgia and Ukraine with a Membership Action Plan (MAP) to pursue NATO ascension.⁷

Throughout her campaign, Clinton has repeatedly appeared—purposefully or not—more hawkish than the typical Democratic Party platform. Her aggressive foreign policy especially contrasts with Sanders' pacifism, which makes it difficult to distinguish certain policies along party lines. Her aggressive stance may bring over more independent voters or wayward neoconservative Republican voters; typically, for issues like foreign policy, American voters choose candidates along expectations of party platforms. By thinking along the margin, Clinton is making it more difficult to splice between her and her Republican adversaries. Within her own party's contest, Clinton easily rises above Sanders in foreign policy experience. Her campaign will continue to simultaneously acknowledge the threat that enemies pose to the U.S. while projecting Clinton as the candidate that can best protect the American people.

² L.A. Caldwell, "As Terror Fears Rise, Clinton Walks Fine Line on Foreign Policy," *NBC News*, 15 December 2015, www.nbcnews.com/politics/2016-election/terror-fears-rise-clinton-walks-fine-line-foreign-policy-n479716.

³ "S.Res.526—A resolution condemning the murder of United States journalist Paul Klebnikov on July 9, 2004, in Moscow, and the murders of other members of the media in the Russian Federation," www.congress.gov/bill/109th-congress/senate-resolution/526?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22Clinton%22%5D%7D.

⁴ "S.3567—A bill to establish a Commission on the conflict between Russia and Georgia, and for other purposes," www.congress.gov/bill/110th-congress/senate-bill/3567?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22Clinton%22%5D%7D.

⁵ "Hillary Clinton on Foreign Policy," *On the Issues*, www.ontheissues.org/celeb/Hillary_Clinton_Foreign_Policy.htm.

⁶ "Hillary Clinton Addresses the Iran Nuclear Deal," *Brookings Institute*, 9 September 2015, www.brookings.edu/~media/events/2015/09/09-clinton-iran/20150909_clinton_iran_transcript.pdf.

⁷ "S.R. 439," *On the Issues*, 31 January 2008, www.ontheissues.org/Notebook/Note_2008-SR439.htm.

Bernie Sanders: Turning Inward

Bernie Sanders is not running on a foreign policy platform; he is running on a domestic policy platform. In previous elections, this would have been a safe choice, as issues such as the economy, jobs, taxes and social equality typically drive voter concerns and motivate turnout. But since 2016 is a different mix, his strategy is poorly timed.⁸ Despite the importance voters are putting on foreign policy, Sanders has failed to address foreign policy in his campaign, perhaps due in part to the Vermont senator's dearth of foreign policy experience.

The Vermont senator is the longest-serving elected official among the field of candidates—an insider. Sanders started representing Vermont as a congressman in 1991, moving to the U.S. Senate in 2007. Despite his significant time in politics, Sanders has accomplished little; his legacy includes a history of alienating his fellow representatives and senators, which has come at the cost of the success of programmes and policies he supports. His unwillingness to compromise could be problematic were Sanders to become commander in chief, where consideration of varying opinions is needed on an everyday basis, particularly on topics where Sanders lacks expertise, such as foreign policy.

Sanders has rarely mentioned foreign policy on the campaign trail. When pressed in questions by media or audience members, his most repeated claim to fame has been the declaration that he voted against the war in Iraq⁹ and to bring troops home,¹⁰ mostly to differentiate himself from Clinton. Aside from that, he has stuck to loose rhetoric about cooperating with allies and going after America's enemies. He has yet to put forth any tenable policy suggestions on how either of these will be pursued once he is in office, leaving onlookers largely without a roadmap. The foreign policy section of his campaign website, titled "War and Peace," lists the most dangerous threats to the U.S. as ISIS and Al-Qaeda, indicating that the senator's focus, like many other candidates, is grounded in the Middle East. Indeed, Sanders has mostly buffered his lack of foreign policy experience or policy with the concept of using force as a last resort, though he does mention the importance of meeting threats with the help of allies.¹¹

In his 25 years in the legislative branch, Sanders has sponsored almost no legislation pertaining to international relations—most of the bills he has sponsored fall into the category of "armed forces and national security" (27%).¹² The Vermont senator has co-sponsored a great deal of legislation, much of it dealing with human rights. While his voting record shows that Sanders has opposed many non-peaceful ventures, he also has supported several, such as 1990's intervention in the Balkans and, more recently, the U.S. and EU sanctions against Russia in response to its aggression in Ukraine. Still his reluctance to engage in conflict frequently leads him to avoid the mere chance of conflict; for example, in 1997, Sanders opposed the European Security Act (H.R. 1758), which allowed for the expansion of NATO to the Baltic countries and Romania, out of fear that the expansion could provoke Russia militarily, something he saw as avoidable and unnecessary since the Cold War was over.¹³ In a 2014 interview, when asked about how to deal with Russia, Sanders replied, "force should be the last option we use."¹⁴ In a speech at Georgetown University in November 2015, Sanders called for international cooperation to fight terrorism by creating a globalised version of NATO, which, ironically, would include Russia.¹⁵

⁸ E. Saunders, "Will foreign policy be a major issue in the 2016 election: Here's what we know," *The Washington Post*, 26 January 2016, www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/01/26/will-foreign-policy-be-a-major-issue-in-the-2016-election-heres-what-we-know.

⁹ N. Jara, "Why Bernie Sanders Should Not Be President," *The Huffington Post*, 21 October 2015, www.huffingtonpost.com/nate-jara/why-bernie-sanders-should_b_8342442.html.

¹⁰ "J.Res.55—Withdrawal of United States Armed Forces From Iraq Resolution of 2005—Homeward Bound," www.congress.gov/bill/109th-congress/house-joint-resolution/55?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22Sanders%22%5D%7D.

¹¹ "War and Peace," 2016, <https://berniesanders.com/issues/war-and-peace>.

¹² "Sen. Bernard "Bernie" Sanders," www.govtrack.us/congress/members/bernard_sanders/400357.

¹³ *Congressional Record—Extensions of Remarks*, 10 June 1997, www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CREC-1997-06-10/pdf/CREC-1997-06-10-pt1-PgE1159-6.pdf.

¹⁴ "The Ed Show," *MSNBC News*, 3 March 2014, www.nbcnews.com/id/54574433/ns/msnbc-the_ed_show/t/ed-show-monday-march/#.VbmbfflVhBc.

¹⁵ B. Sanders, "Senator Bernie Sanders on Democratic Socialism in the United States," 19 November 2015, <https://berniesanders.com/democratic-socialism-in-the-united-states>.

So far, Sanders has shown support for President Obama's current policies to scale down U.S. military engagement, but has deviated from the strategy of global engagement that characterised the Obama presidency. Sanders has few of his own proposals to bring to the table, and has a largely negative view of U.S. engagement abroad, indicating that he would prefer to disengage.¹⁶ For American voters focused on foreign policy, this simply will not make the cut, and foreign observers can expect little from Sanders, who will likely put his effort into domestic reforms rather than undertake any robust missions abroad. Sanders as president would almost certainly usher in an era of isolationism—not necessarily a favourable trait for Americans looking for a leader against terrorism and U.S. allies looking for protection against looming incursions.

The Three Republican Personalities

Donald J. Trump: Strength without Temperateness

Apart from building multi-million dollar investments overseas, Donald Trump has zero foreign policy experience. His strategy is strength, albeit a rather nebulously defined version. This works well as a campaign and public relations strategy, but it does not translate well into foreign policy planning. Having never served in public office, he lacks a policy résumé or voting record. Observers are not privy to his payroll of foreign policy advisors, whom he loosely alludes to as “generals and commanders”—all shadowy ghosts with no concrete manifestation. This leaves Trump blind to foreign policy and Trump-watchers left with an opaque view of what shape his presidency could take. Trump's policy is heavily infused with his personality; he riffs on his own character to throw momentum behind ideas without explaining or exploring how those ideas would manifest. Much of what Trump says is factually incorrect.¹⁷ Ultimately, American voters and international onlookers have little idea of what to really expect from Trump—a worrisome proposition.

There are three important examples of Trump's waffling that could be disastrous to U.S. foreign policy were he to win the Republican primary and ascend to the Oval Office. First, throughout his campaign, he has continued to flip-flop between interference and non-interference abroad. Trump advocates a pugnacious build-up of U.S. military might: “Nobody is going to mess with us. Our military is going to be made much stronger.”¹⁸ Yet, he has, in no speech or policy briefing, elaborated on how this will be attained, eschewing specifics such as the number of troops, weapons, or the source of funding for such considerable investment. Furthermore, Trump's strategy is hyper-focused on a U.S. military build-up for the sake of protecting Americans on U.S. soil, not necessarily U.S. allies abroad. Finally, his policy is overwrought, leading to bombastic statements and ineffective solutions. He has vociferously and offensively assured his electorate of his intent to pursue ISIS,¹⁹ even threatening to go after the families of ISIS members.²⁰ It is chilling to think that a U.S. presidential candidate could countenance putting hits on women and children. He has squarely accused China of being the biggest “abuser” of the U.S.—a country President Obama, through his “pivot to Asia,” was grooming for closer cooperation.²¹ Upsetting a potential partner is unwise and serves to be unsettling to some of the allies closer to the U.S.

While Trump supports NATO, he has not discussed or campaigned for increased troops on NATO's eastern flank. Regarding tensions in Ukraine, Trump is again guilty of flip-flopping and lacks a coherent policy. In 2015, via video conference, Trump criticised President Obama's measures to an audience in Kyiv, saying the

¹⁶ T. Wright, “Sanders' great leap inward: What his rejection of Obama's worldview means for U.S. foreign policy,” *Brookings*, 26 February 2016, www.brookings.edu/blogs/order-from-chaos/posts/2016/02/26-bernie-sanders-foreign-policy-wright.

¹⁷ According to the fact-check site *PolitiFact*, 17% of what Trump has said is “mostly false;” 40% is “false;” and 20% is listed as being “Pants on Fire,” or extremely false, www.politifact.com/personalities/donald-trump.

¹⁸ “Interview with Presidential Candidate Donald Trump; Interview with Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders; Interview with Florida Senator Marco Rubio; State of the Cartoonion: Republicans' ‘Super Heroic’ Lineup,” *CNN*, 25 October 2015, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1510/25/sotu.01.html>.

¹⁹ P. Engel, “Donald Trump: ‘I would bomb the s--- out of ISIS,’” *Business Insider*, 13 November 2015, www.businessinsider.com/donald-trump-bomb-isis-2015-11.

²⁰ N. Gass, “Trump: We have to take out ISIL members' families,” *Politico*, 2 December 2015, www.politico.com/story/2015/12/trump-kill-isis-families-216343#ixzz41EJEdFHj.

²¹ D.J. Trump, “Ending China's Currency Manipulation,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 9 November 2015, www.wsj.com/articles/ending-chinas-currency-manipulation-1447115601?alg=y.

president should do more to defend Ukraine, but Trump failed to offer his own vision of U.S. policy and support for the EU-hopeful country.²² In the same talk, Trump added that European countries should be doing more to solve their own problems rather than rushing to the United States for aid; this portends the possibility for military spending cuts in regions Trump deems less consequential or able to fend for themselves.²³ He has expressed ambivalence to the possibility of Ukraine joining NATO—an indicator that he has considered neither the gravity of the situation nor the consequences of Ukraine’s ascension to the Western military alliance. Conversely, Trump has hinted at a rather cosy relationship with NATO’s current primary antagonist, Russia. Trump has expressed his hope that Russia and the United States would cooperate,²⁴ and has personally complimented Putin, calling him “a strong leader.”²⁵ As a part of reworking ties between the U.S. and Russia, Trump has specifically mentioned pursuing cooperation with Russia against ISIS—which could come at the cost of U.S. allies and break the tenuous situation in Ukraine.²⁶ After winning New Hampshire, Trump’s victory speech focused on making American great again, “the old-fashioned way”—by beating other countries, like China. This is Trump’s strategy: lashing out at enemies and defeating others, not building partnerships. Fuelled by defensiveness, Trump’s vision leads to a dog-eat-dog foreign policy approach, filled with uncertainty, that could push America’s allies away and embolden its enemies.

Ted Cruz: Against Obama’s Legacy

Senator Ted Cruz rose to power on the coattails of the Tea Party movement in 2013. Cruz has an outsider status and is marked by his outspokenness and divisive personality; he frequently lacks the ability to rally support to his cause. There is little to say about Cruz’s foreign policy legacy, as he has few defining foreign policy moments. Cruz’s platform lacks originality: it tailors closely to the Republican Party platform, namely, hawkish and critical of President Obama.

During Senator Cruz’s three years in office, 27% of his sponsored bills have dealt with foreign affairs, the largest percentage of any other group such as immigration or the economy.²⁷ Many of these bills pertain to designations of a terrorist group, such as S. 2230, S. 2094, or S.Con.Res.41.²⁸ He has sponsored two pieces of legislation on upholding the sanctions against Iran, S. 825 and S. 2672; he has also twice sponsored resolutions to stymie President Obama’s negotiations on the Iran Deal—S.Res. 328 and S.Res. 252.²⁹ Cruz vehemently opposes the Iran nuclear deal; he argues that it weakens U.S. national security, putting dangerous weapons in the hands of U.S. enemies, and he has sworn to overturn it were he elected president.

The Texas senator serves on the Senate Armed Services Committee, which is in part responsible for the strategic placement of U.S. forces abroad. Apart from the usual rhetoric on pursuing ISIS and shoring up U.S. military might against terrorist threats, Europe’s east will like Cruz: he has supported tougher measures against Russia, including the stationing of an anti-ballistic missile system in Poland and Romania. In 2014, amidst the Ukraine crisis, he co-sponsored S.Res. 370, supporting the territorial integrity of Ukraine and calling on Russia to withdraw its forces from Crimea.³⁰ He is a proponent of providing lethal aid to Ukraine amidst the crisis and Russian aggression.³¹

²² N. Gass, “Trump bashes Obama before Ukrainian audience,” *Politico*, 11 September 2015, www.politico.com/story/2015/09/donald-trump-ukraine-foreign-policy-2016-213561.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ “Meet the Press,” *MSNBC News*, 20 December 2015, www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/video/donald-trump-on-clinton--putin-and-bush-589066819639.

²⁶ “Meet the Press,” *MSNBC News*, 4 October 2015, www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/meet-press-transcript-october-4-2015-n438271.

²⁷ “Sen. Ted Cruz,” www.govtrack.us/congress/members/ted_cruz/412573.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ “Senator Ted Cruz,” www.congress.gov/member/ted-cruz/C001098?q=%7B%22sponsorship%22%3A%22sponsored%22%2C%22subject%22%3A%22International+Affairs%22%7D.

³⁰ “S.Res.370—A resolution supporting the territorial integrity of Ukraine and condemning Russian military aggression in Ukraine,” www.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/senate-resolution/370?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22Russia%22%5D%7D&resultIndex=2.

³¹ “Cruz pushes for US to arm Ukraine, as European leaders push for cease-fire,” *Fox News*, 8 February 2015, www.foxnews.com/politics/2015/02/08/cruz-pushes-for-us-to-arm-ukraine-plan-opposed-by-germany-ahead-possible-peace.html.

Marco Rubio: Clear on Russia

A senator representing Florida in the U.S. Senate since 2011, Marco Rubio has cast himself as the best foreign-policy candidate among the Republican contenders; he has the second-best foreign policy experience when compared to all of the candidates, after Clinton. During his tenure in the Senate, he has served on the Foreign Relations Committee, giving him experience in dealing with the day-to-day grind of foreign policy decisions. Over his five-year Senate career, 39% of Rubio's sponsored legislation has been foreign-policy related.³²

Rubio has been particularly vociferous about his stance on Russia: he authored a piece in *Foreign Policy* that indicated his policy towards Russia were he to be president.³³ His plan included the intent to restore Ukraine's sovereignty through strength, which involves providing lethal weapons and training to Ukrainian troops. This is consistent with his activity in the Senate, where he has sponsored three pieces of legislation directly related to Russia and Ukraine, S. 2725, "Consequences for Russia's Arms Control Violations Act of 2014," S.Res. 448, on actions by the U.S. to stabilise Ukraine's currency, and S.Con.Res. 34, condemning Russia's breach of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (IRNF).³⁴ Rubio co-sponsored S.Res. 378, a bipartisan piece of legislation condemning Russia's aggression in Ukraine.³⁵ Indeed, he has consistently taken a strong position alongside U.S. allies against Russia's aggression in the east, including extending military cooperation to countries threatened by Russia's revanchist policy, such as Moldova and Georgia. Rubio, like Cruz, voted in support of providing lethal aid to Ukraine in an effort to stave off Russian incursions, and, like Cruz and Clinton, he is a proponent of increasing and intensifying economic and personal sanctions on the country. Furthermore, Rubio, also like Cruz, plans to "station U.S. combat troops in eastern Europe," something that will come as sweet music to the ears of Central and Eastern European leaders after the U.S. got cold feet in the region.³⁶

On the Middle East and China, the Florida senator has been less outspoken. His rhetoric and legislative actions pertaining to the Middle East tend to be more perfunctory—generally condemning terrorism or terrorist groups—rather than meaningful policy. Following the line of the Republican Party, Rubio opposed President Obama's negotiations and nuclear deal with Iran, and he, too has promised to repudiate it the day he is sworn into office.³⁷

Since about mid-December 2015, the two Republican senators—Cruz and Rubio—have been sparring to prove which is the better foreign policy candidate. The difference between the two is in their personalities and their approach to cooperation: Cruz is prickly, unpopular, and ultra-conservative; Rubio is hesitant and inexperienced, but can be charismatic and flexible, and he is neoconservative, which means he occasionally walks the line into liberal territory, making compromise easier. Rubio has a better track record of cooperation within his own Republican Party, and he is not as isolating towards the Democratic Party as Cruz. This is important, as the future president will need to cooperate across party lines and with his or her own party in Congress. Furthermore, a strong foreign policy leader must embrace compromise with other leaders and nations rather than sticking to dogmatic preconceived notions and prejudices. In this sense, while the two boast similar drawbacks and strength, Senator Rubio would be the more effective leader.

³² "Sen. Marco Rubio," www.govtrack.us/congress/members/marco_rubio/412491.

³³ M. Rubio, "Restoring America's Strength," *Foreign Affairs*, September 2015, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2015-08-04/restoring-america-s-strength.

³⁴ "S.Con.Res.34—A concurrent resolution expressing the sense of Congress in honor of the life and legacy of Vaclav Havel," www.congress.gov/bill/112th-congress/senate-concurrent-resolution/34.

³⁵ "S.Res.378—A resolution condemning illegal Russian aggression in Ukraine," www.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/senate-resolution/378/cosponsors?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22Russia%22%5D%7D&resultIndex=9.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ „In Senate Floor Speech, Rubio Opposes Iran Deal," 10 September 2015, www.rubio.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/press-releases?ID=e4eb5a76-cb51-45d1-8ca3-6ac99a58417b.

Conclusion

With such a varied spectrum of candidates and ideas, what can voters and international onlookers expect from the international position of the U.S. and U.S. foreign policy from the victory of one of these five candidates? The candidates in the 2016 presidential election can be divided by more than just party; a line can also be drawn between conventional and unconventional candidates. The framework of conventional versus nonconventional is an indication of what observers can expect from their foreign policy. Conventional candidates are traditional and generally stick to their party's platform on issues such as foreign policy. This makes it easier to anticipate what policy would be like under these candidates—they have already given us a roadmap. On the other hand, unconventional candidates do not toe the party line on issues, tending to deviate—this makes it harder for onlookers to guess what such candidates will do once in office; they are rogue actors. Unconventional candidates are rare, and it is even rarer that one makes it far into the nomination process. This election cycle, the United States has two in opposing camps: Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders. Neither candidate was expected to make it this far in the race, and both lack cogent foreign policy plans. Trump has compensated for this by bombastically commenting on all manner of foreign policy topics, none of which can be taken seriously by voters or onlookers. This is worrying, as it foretells a major blind spot on a vital voter issue. Sanders has addressed his lack of foreign policy experience by largely ignoring it and sticking to his domestic plan. This, too, leaves onlookers with little indication of what the Vermont senator would do if elected to presidential office. On issues such as China, terrorism, and Russia, both men have merely alluded to ideas or stuck to general truisms; this is not a strategy for success, and it signals little to America's allies or enemies.

The other group of candidates, with Clinton, Cruz, and Rubio, is conventional. They stick to their parties' ideologies and platforms on foreign policy and their campaigns, voting records, and previous policy stances better illuminate the situation for voters and international onlookers: maintaining the status quo. If Clinton is elected, she will likely stay on the same path as President Obama, except tougher: the United States will remain militarily engaged in the Middle East; Clinton will likely pursue a harder line on Russia, which indicates Europe will not be forgotten in favour of the pivot to Asia; China, too, will not be overlooked, as Clinton will continue Obama's overtures to the country in hopes of closing the gap and calming unrest in the Pacific. Clinton's challenge would be at home rather than abroad, where she would likely have to fight a Republican-majority Congress on every policy, hawkish or not. Republican dislike of Clinton is so strong that the Republican Party leaders will fight her even on issues they would normally support. Cruz and Rubio have many foreign policy similarities, and they would have a common list of priorities but different ways of addressing those priorities. Rubio has expressed his intent to engage abroad and a willingness to work across party lines to accomplish broader goals for the American public; Cruz has not expressed the same willingness and even faces resistance within his own party. Indeed, Cruz is the most "unconventional" among the "conventional" candidates, which also makes him the mostly likely to deviate from any expectations or policy indications he has given thus far. Still, both men have declared their intent to abolish and rework the Iran nuclear deal, their determination to bring terrorist groups like the Islamic State to heel, their resolve to further punish Russia for its incursions in Ukraine while propping up European allies, and their plans to engage China as a competitor and a partner. This, at least, like Clinton, gives onlookers a foundation from which to start, one based on a mixture of ideology, experience and trying to win over voters.

From the Polish and Central European perspective, unconventional candidates like Sanders and Trump pose a risk of U.S. isolationism and focus on domestic issues on one side and out-of-control rhetoric with no action on the other. The other candidates all promise a tougher position against Russia and strengthening of NATO, however, Republican candidates Rubio and Cruz are hinting at bigger U.S. involvement in Ukraine, including provisions of lethal aid. For the EU, which puts diplomacy and negotiations as a priority, Clinton could be an easier partner during the talks on the Iran deal or within the UN framework. Unpredictability in global affairs is disconcerting, whether it be the unexpectedness of an attack or trying to guess who next will be at the helm of one of the world's strongest militaries, but, like warfare, it can be remedied with conventional weapons of information, preparedness, and flexibility to an ever-evolving reality on the ground. This is how the U.S. presidential candidates are treating their race, and this is how international onlookers should treat the possibility of any one of them becoming president of the United States.