



Demographic Changes and U.S. Foreign Policy

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Abstract: The demographic shift in America may well strengthen U.S. foreign policy, as well as military capability and economic competitiveness. In a globalized world, America's ethnic diversity, the innovation that comes from bringing the best and the brightest from around the world to this country, and the fact that a diverse population becomes a stakeholder class could all work to ensure that the United States remains the most influential nation in the world.

Much has been written about how demographics will change international politics. The case is made essentially that the west will grow old and the non-Western nations will remain young thereby creating severe conflict dynamics in the latter group of countries. In the West, on the other hand, aging populations will be less productive and more demanding of social services, like healthcare. Internally, there has been alarmist literature about the “browning” of Europe and about the electoral consequences of the Latino population’s rise in the United States.¹ Little has been written, however, about how the changing demographics of the United States will impact on the U.S. worldview and its future foreign policy.

This article suggests that if by 2044, as the U.S. Census Bureau indicates, “minorities” in America become the majority, there may be some significant reorientations of American foreign policy with a shift of emphasis to Asia and Latin America. More importantly, the U.S.-EU relationship may undergo some fundamental changes or normalization. Moreover, shifting demographic trends will

¹ For a discussion of the Europe situation, see Ian Buruma’s *Murder in Amsterdam: Liberal Europe, Islam, and the Limits of Tolerance* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2007). The best polemic on the perceived Latino challenge to American society and national identity remains Samuel P. Huntington’s *Who Are We?: The Challenge to America’s National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004).

allow the United States to compete more effectively within the international system and allow it to remain innovative, economically wealthy, and militarily effective.

The Changing Demographic Landscape in America

The U.S. Census Bureau has estimated that by 2044 minorities will become the majority in America.² While there may be minor fluctuations in these calculations, America's politicians already have started to shift their political strategies to address this changing political reality. Consider the attempt to seek a long-term solution to the issue of undocumented people in the United States—although Donald Trump may have torpedoed temporarily that initiative. There is also the move by the Republican Party, albeit hesitatingly, to try and create a political platform that will appeal to the broader Latino voter base. What has not been discussed adequately in the public policy realm, as yet, is how will this demographic shift affect foreign policy?

This author believes that the new majority will start to redefine America's foreign policy priorities and capabilities in four ways. *First*, there will be a shift of geographical emphasis in U.S. foreign policy with less interest in Europe and greater interest in Latin America and Asia. This will be aided in part by trends in the global economy, particularly in the rise of China and India to the status of the world's first and third largest economies, as well as the growing importance of Asia in global trade. In the next few years, in terms of purchasing power parity, China is expected to become the largest economy in the world and by 2030 India will be the third largest economy in the world.³ Asian scholars such as Kishore Mahbubani, therefore, see the shift in economic power being followed by a shift in political power toward Asia.⁴

Second, this demographic shift may see a move toward redefining the U.S.-Europe relationship in increasingly transactional rather than socio-cultural or emotional terms. The link created by mass migrations from Europe will naturally be weakened and, instead, one with the non-Western world strengthened. *Third*, there may be a move towards shifting U.S. foreign policy towards a more economic rather than a military-strategic focus. *Fourth*, the shifting demographics of the United States will give the country a major advantage in international politics since it improves the capabilities of both its defense and foreign policy establishments.

Race, Culture, and Foreign Policy

² Sandra L. Colby and Jennifer M. Ortman, *Projections of the Size and Composition of the U.S. Population: 2014-2060*, U.S. Census Bureau, March 2015, p. 9.

³ Åsa Johansson, Yvan Guillemette, Fabrice Murtin, David Turner, Giuseppe Nicoletti, Christine de la Maisonnette, Philip Bagnoli, Guillaume Bousquet and Francesca Spinelli, *Looking to 2060: Long-term global growth prospects*, OECD Economic Policy Papers, No. 3, Nov. 2012.

⁴ See Kishore Mahbubani, *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008).

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