



THE 14TH ANNUAL MERIDIAN SUMMIT

SHAPING GEOPOLITICAL FUTURES



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INTRODUCTION

Amid rapidly shifting global dynamics and intensifying geopolitical rivalry, Meridian International Center brought together more than 275 influential leaders from government, diplomacy, and industry for the 14th Annual Meridian Summit on October 24, 2025. Held at Gallup World Headquarters in Washington, D.C., the Summit served as an essential forum for addressing the urgent challenges and emerging opportunities facing the international community. Attendees explored themes including great-power competition, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, energy resilience, and economic cooperation, engaging with speakers such as Alaska Governor Mike Dunleavy, National Cyber Director Sean Cairncross, Rep. Ami Bera (CA-6), Ambassador of Norway Anniken Huitfeldt, Ambassador of the Philippines Jose Romualdez, and The Honorable Dina Powell McCormick, among many others.

Bringing together government officials, representatives from 38 embassies, and prominent voices from the corporate sector, the conversations equipped leaders with the practical tools and fresh perspectives to navigate an increasingly complex global landscape, while sparking a dynamic exchange of insights and strategies.

Meridian is a nonpartisan center for diplomacy founded in 1960 and headquartered on a historic campus in Washington, DC. Our mission is to empower leaders to advance the next era of diplomacy. Through programs that strengthen American leadership, Meridian fosters collaboration on shared challenges, enhances economic competitiveness, and builds geopolitical resilience. We equip leaders from business, science and technology, cities and states, culture and sports with the insights, networks, and resources to navigate a complex world.

POWER, INFLUENCE, AND THE EVOLVING INTERNATIONAL LANDSCAPE



(From Left to Right) Heather Nauert, Acting Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs and U.S. Department of State Spokesperson (2017 - 2019); The Honorable Ami Bera, U.S. Representative (CA-6)

As global power dynamics continue to shift, the United States faces consequential choices about how to lead, compete, and cooperate in an increasingly complex world.

In this bipartisan fireside conversation, Representative Ami Bera, Ranking Member of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on East Asia and the Pacific, joined Heather Nauert, Meridian Trustee and Acting Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs and U.S. Department of State Spokesperson (2017–2019), to discuss what U.S. strategic leadership means in an era of geopolitical uncertainty—from strengthening alliances and ensuring economic resilience to balancing domestic considerations with global leadership.

Key Takeaways

America's partners must take a more active role to keep the U.S. engaged globally

As American voters and policymakers increasingly prioritize domestic issues—from jobs and affordability to opportunities for future generations—the United States' sustained engagement abroad depends on stronger contributions from its allies and partners. If other nations want the U.S. to remain a leader in global affairs, they must shoulder greater responsibility for maintaining international stability.

“Our alliances are changing,” explained Nauert, “and our allies are having to shift their thinking and their actions as they work with the new Trump administration.”

From investing in security and defense to mediating conflicts and supporting regional stability, deeper partnerships will demonstrate to the American people and policymakers that allies seek more than just America's resources and capabilities; they seek its leadership and vision. According to Bera, this allied renewal is already taking place:

“I don't think it's a Republican or Democratic thing. You're watching Japan step up and increase its defense spending. You're watching Korea do the same thing. You're seeing the Quad Coalition coming together, and AUKUS. So, I think the relationships are going to change, and they'll probably be more values-based.”

Stronger foreign partnerships begin with better domestic cooperation

Many of America's core foreign policy priorities—strengthening alliances in the Indo-Pacific, reinforcing supply chains, and advancing economic security—enjoy broad bipartisan support in both Congress and among voters. While the rhetoric may differ, “Democrats and Republicans are pretty much on the same page,” stressed Bera. However, limited coordination between the executive branch and Congress has constrained policy effectiveness, with the legislative branch often deferring to the administration. Renewed dialogue and collaboration at home would create a stronger, more unified foundation for America's engagement abroad.

Peace and prosperity are not guaranteed

“America's role in the world is changing. We really do have to pay attention to domestic concerns of younger generations, and it's not just isolated to America,” explained Bera. Economic pressures, rising inequality, and generational anxieties are global phenomena, not limited to the United States. Nations that share democratic values must work together to preserve the peace and prosperity that have defined recent decades. Continued collaboration both domestically within the United States and internationally among partners is essential to ensuring that future generations inherit a world of stability, opportunity, and shared progress. “We all want our children and grandchildren to enjoy the same peace and prosperity that we did,” Bera added.

Next Steps

The path forward for U.S. global engagement lies in balancing domestic renewal with sustained international leadership. Policymakers should prioritize deeper collaboration between Congress and the executive branch to ensure coherent, bipartisan foreign policy strategies. At the same time, America's allies and partners must take on greater responsibility in advancing shared security and economic resilience. Strengthening these partnerships will reinforce global stability while addressing voters' desire for policies that deliver tangible benefits at home. As the international landscape grows more complex, continued dialogue among policymakers, diplomats, and citizens will be essential to sustaining America's role as a trusted, engaged, and values-driven leader on the world stage.

By Omar Vargas, Vice President, Global Public Policy, General Motors

General Motors is proud to serve as the 2025 corporate chair for the annual Meridian Summit and Ball.

This year marks the 65th anniversary of Meridian International Center, an institution we've had the privilege of engaging with for nearly two decades.

Over the years, I've witnessed Meridian's unique ability to convene political and business leaders to navigate the global landscape. Meridian is the premier platform for commercial diplomacy, an essential function for any company involved in public policy advocacy and public sector developments. In today's dynamic economic and geopolitical environment, Meridian's role as a convener is more essential than ever.

General Motors is deeply committed to developing public policy solutions and working alongside partners like Meridian to help shape a more resilient future. Headquartered in Detroit, GM holds four iconic vehicle brands: Chevrolet, Cadillac, GMC, and Buick. GM is an economic powerhouse for the global economy, with more assembly plants in the U.S. than any other automaker. We have a network of 50 U.S. manufacturing plants and parts facilities in 19 states.

At GM, we believe thoughtful policy can drive technological advancement, innovation, and collaboration.

It can unlock greater value, quality, and reliability in the products and services we deliver. And it can shape a more secure, modern, and prosperous industrial economy—one where the U.S. leads with purpose.

Companies need economies of scale to compete globally and win. Reaching scale requires predictable demand, efficient rules, and coordination with trusted allies to lower risk and cost, draw capital, and access new markets. However, important policy considerations like sourcing, supply chain resiliency, consumer demand signals, regulatory considerations, and the evolution of technology often fail to align and sometimes come into competition with each other. The U.S. can strengthen its manufacturing capabilities while also deepening

work with North American countries.

Take, for example, the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA). This agreement has been a cornerstone of economic growth since 2020, both for GM and for our country. With the stability USMCA provided, GM and our suppliers made the regional and domestic investments necessary to meet the agreement's stringent automotive requirements. In total, GM has invested more than \$60 billion in the U.S. since 2020 and recently committed to nearly \$5 billion more to expand production capacity in Michigan, Kansas, Tennessee, and New York.

As we look ahead, GM supports a targeted USMCA review to extend and deepen the long-term policy clarity, certainty, and stability that enable economic growth. We encourage common-sense updates to support innovation and competitiveness while increasing investment and jobs at home. A rejuvenated USMCA would bring even greater benefits for regional competitiveness and national and economic security.

An updated USMCA would also help bring high-quality, affordable cars, trucks, and SUVs to our customers. The current agreement protects duty-free treatment for all goods that meet USMCA requirements, something every vehicle GM produces in North America already achieves. Maintaining and expanding favorable USMCA treatment for Section 232 tariffs and reciprocal trade measures would keep supply chains stable and reduce price volatility for our customers. Pragmatic updates on tighter rules of origin, streamlined Customs documentation and certification requirements, and aligned technical standards would reduce costs while supporting U.S. workers and high-paying, high-quality jobs.

GM has committed to grow our domestic capacity in line with the U.S. administration's priorities.

Manufacturing sites will take time to scale and achieve cost competitiveness, and during that time, government can explore public-private investment to accelerate durable demand. This could include credit enhancements, co-investment, and production tax credits tied to North American content to catalyze capital investment into advanced manufacturing. Federal, state, and municipal fleet

BUILDING A RESILIENT FUTURE



commitments with USMCA content thresholds could anchor early volumes and signal long-term demand. State and local governments can consider tools in the toolbox, like sales tax suspensions for EVs with significant U.S. content.

Successful high-quality American products contribute to economic strength and national security. North America, working together, is the strongest economic player in the world and can be a powerful counterweight to other countries or blocs.

GM has been strategically building a resilient North American supply chain. Our industry-leading strategy covers everything from sourcing critical minerals and semiconductors to manufacturing battery cells and electric drive motors. For example, our supplier MP Materials is restarting domestic production of permanent magnets in Texas this year. GM spent years working with MP Materials to provide manufacturing engineering. In recent months, the U.S. government has entered a strategic partnership with MP Materials that provides additional capital and demand guarantees. This type of demand pull can be a model.

GM's sourcing initiatives are not just about immediate gains but are long-term investments for the future. Efforts to secure critical minerals now will benefit national security over the next several decades, regardless of immediate market conditions. But transitions take time, and industry needs stable policy, clear timelines, and government–industry collaboration to unlock private investment.

Further beneficial collaboration could include establishment of a strategic materials reserve for critical minerals with targeted offtake, stockpiling, and price-stabilization tools, paired with fast-track approvals for allied sourcing and recycling. Market-making policies can drive competitiveness and technology leadership, creating real demand for American-made products.

From securing the supply chain to investing in advanced manufacturing, GM is taking action to build a stronger auto industry.

Thoughtful policy design and implementation—like that enabled by Meridian's unique convening power across business and government—supercharge our efforts.

2025 Meridian Corporate Leader Award Recipient



MARY T. BARRA

Chair and Chief Executive Officer, General Motors

“It’s an honor to receive the Meridian Corporate Leader Award on behalf of the team at General Motors. Meridian’s work connecting political and business leaders is more important than ever in today’s global landscape. Your efforts help drive progress and diplomacy. As America’s largest automaker, GM helps fuel economic growth and support jobs around the country. We recognize the powerful role policy can play in shaping a more secure and modern industrial economy. Through forums like this, we have the opportunity to work together to create even greater impact. We look forward to continuing our partnership in the days ahead.”

THE LEADERSHIP IMPERATIVE

As global influence is reshaped by shifting alliances, emerging technologies, and increasingly competitive talent dynamics, today's leaders are being asked to adapt at a pace without precedent. Success now depends on the ability to strengthen trust, empower agile workforces, and apply innovation with strategic foresight. These themes took center stage during a cross-sector panel featuring the Ambassador of Norway to the United States Her Excellency Anniken Huitfeldt; Intel Executive Vice President and Chief Legal Officer April Miller Boise; and Heidrick & Struggles CEO Tom Monahan. Moderated by PBS NewsHour White House correspondent Liz Landers, the session examined how governments and companies alike are leveraging workforce strategy as technological innovations add a new dimension of international competitiveness and soft power. Effective talent strategies extend beyond individual organizations; they shape national and global competitiveness by influencing international talent flows and cultivating the next generation of leaders capable of navigating complex, interconnected challenges.

Key Takeaways

Trust is now a competitive advantage

Trust has become a decisive competitive advantage across diplomacy, business, and national security. Consistent follow-through on commitments builds dependability and credibility at both institutional and individual levels, Miller Boise noted, forming a foundational asset for organizations. Credibility and legitimacy rely on demonstrating accountability, clarity of purpose, and a steadfast alignment with shared values. Leaders who prioritize cultivating a culture of trust empower their organizations to navigate uncertainty more effectively, accelerating decision-making and enabling teams to act confidently even in volatile environments.

Talent is the engine of strategic resilience

Talent isn't just a resource; it is the engine powering strategic resilience across industries and governments alike. Ambassador Anniken Huitfeldt highlighted Norway's forward-thinking investments in continuous education and inclusive policies that

cultivate adaptable, future-ready talent. Leaders who create environments where employees are empowered to continuously learn, innovate, and take prudent risks are building teams capable of thriving amid AI-driven change and complex geopolitical shifts. Organizations must prioritize building agile, mission-aligned workforces resilient to disruption. Investing deeply in nurturing diverse pipelines of future leaders is no longer optional; it is essential to sustaining innovation, competitive edge, and national power in a hyperconnected world.

Innovation requires intentional governance

Tom Monahan emphasized the importance of curiosity and human judgment in guiding organizations, even as artificial intelligence and digital tools increasingly augment decision-making, yet curiosity and human judgment remain essential in guiding organization. Tom Monahan emphasized the dual potential of AI: it can enhance global cooperation but also deepen divides if left unchecked. Responsible governance frameworks and cross-border standards are essential to harness innovation safely and effectively. Human creativity, ethical discernment, and critical thinking remain indispensable, ensuring technology strengthens rather than strains societal systems. A commitment to ethical implementation will determine whether innovation unites or fragments in a rapidly evolving landscape.

Next Steps

Leaders across sectors must integrate foresight, adaptability, and empathy into every level of decision-making. Success increasingly hinges on the ability to anticipate change, cultivate collaborative networks, and nurture talent equipped to operate in dynamic, fluid environments. Combining strategic vision with inclusive practices and a commitment to continuous learning enables organizations to transform uncertainty into opportunity and thrive in an interconnected, technology-driven world.

Effective leadership prioritizes developing and maintaining trust while embracing innovation in

workforce strategy. This entails cultivating human-centered leadership, investing in adaptable, mission-driven teams, and thoughtfully integrating AI without compromising human judgment. Modeling inclusive practices that attract and retain diverse talent is essential. Leaders should foster curiosity, resilience, and a willingness to experiment, maintaining close

engagement with employees to understand and respond to their evolving needs and capabilities. By sharing best practices and collaborating across sectors, leaders can strengthen organizational and global resilience, ensuring that workforce strategies serve as a strategic lever for influence and long-term competitiveness.



(From Left to Right) Liz Landers, White House Correspondent, PBS News Hour; Her Excellency Anniken Huitfeldt, Ambassador of Norway to the U.S.; Tom Monahan, Chief Executive Officer, Heidrick & Struggles; April Miller Boise, Executive Vice President and Chief Legal Officer, Intel



Her Excellency Anniken Huitfeldt, Ambassador of Norway to the U.S.



April Miller Boise, Executive Vice President and Chief Legal Officer, Intel

PUBLIC OPINION AS A GEOPOLITICAL INDICATOR

By Dan Foy, Principal, Global Analytics, Gallup

The Gallup World Poll tracks hundreds of critical indicators through nationally representative surveys in over 140 countries annually.

For the past 20 years, the World Poll has been uncovering profound discoveries about the experiences, behaviors, and beliefs of all humanity. Among those, three key insights stand out for their relevance to today's global geopolitical landscape.

Economic Divergence

The last decade has seen changing fortunes in how different global blocs see their economic future. A decade ago in 2014, members of the G7 felt just as optimistic about their local economic conditions as people in BRICS+ countries, with slightly below 50% across both blocs saying things were getting better.

Over time, however, the Gallup World Poll has measured a steady divergence in economic optimism. BRICS+ countries have gradually pulled ahead in terms of economic optimism, reaching a slim majority of 55% last year. By contrast, economic optimism has fluctuated in the G7, but the general trend is lower than a year ago, with one in three saying things were getting better in 2024.

This 21-point gulf in median economic optimism is notable compared to external economic data. Economic growth – in terms of real change in GDP – is higher in almost all BRICS+ nations, excluding the United States, than in the G7. While many of these economies remain larger in absolute terms, their rate of growth is lower than many BRICS+ competitors, and public attitudes have dampened in turn.

Institutional Confidence

Twenty years of global data highlight a robust relationship between how people feel about their local conditions and how they feel about their national institutions. Understanding people's confidence in national institutions is important because it offers perspective on the legitimacy, stability and perceived effectiveness of structures that govern people's lives.

Each dot on Chart A represents a country. On the horizontal axis, the score represents the average number (out of 5) of national institutions that the adult population has confidence in over 2006-2024. These institutions are the government, military, judiciary, honesty of elections, and banks. On the vertical axis, we have the average number of local conditions people are satisfied in, out of seven. These are local housing, healthcare, schools, public transport, roads, water and air quality.

Countries where people are satisfied with more aspects of their local area are, on average, confident in more of these national institutions. The robust correlation shows that support for different types of political systems is related to satisfaction with what that system delivers.

Taken together, satisfaction with these seven local conditions is highly associated with national confidence, but some conditions have stronger associations than others. Satisfaction with local schools and satisfaction with the availability of quality healthcare are stronger predictors than others, such as satisfaction with water quality or public transportation.

Migration Intentions

Gallup World Poll data show that migration pressures

remain at historically high levels, with about 18% of the world's adults—roughly 1.4 billion people—saying they would like to move permanently to another country if they could. This global desire to migrate has held near record highs since the pandemic, even as actual migration flows have been affected by border policies, conflicts, and economic shocks.

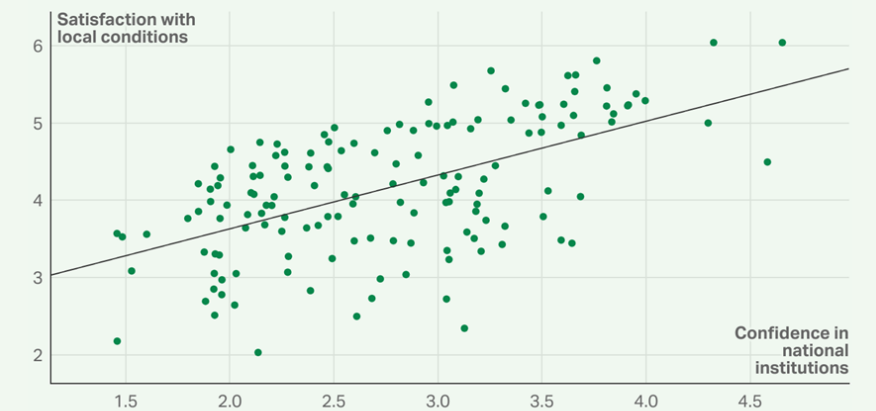
The greatest migration pressures emerge from regions with higher youth populations, lower economic opportunities, and greater political or social instability—a pattern that has strengthened despite global development efforts. The three regions where the largest share of the population wishes to leave have each seen significant increases in that rate over the past decade: Sub-Saharan Africa (36%, up from 29% in 2014), Latin America and the Caribbean (27%, up from 21% in 2014), and the Middle East and North Africa (28%, up from 20% in 2014).

There are likely many reasons people desire to migrate, but chief among them appears to be individual perceptions of their income.

When people feel that they are struggling financially, they are more likely to want to move permanently to another country. That motivation is perhaps particularly acute among younger, better educated, and employed individuals. The countries with the greatest potential to lose citizens (i.e., with more people who desire to migrate) may find that they are losing the most capable members of their next generation.

Chart A
Countries Where People Who Are Satisfied With Local Conditions Are Confident in More National Institutions

Scatter chart plots, at the country level, average satisfaction with seven local conditions and confidence in five national institutions.



Satisfaction with local conditions: housing, healthcare, schools, public transportation, roads, water quality, air quality

Confidence in national institutions: government, military, judicial system, honesty of elections, banks

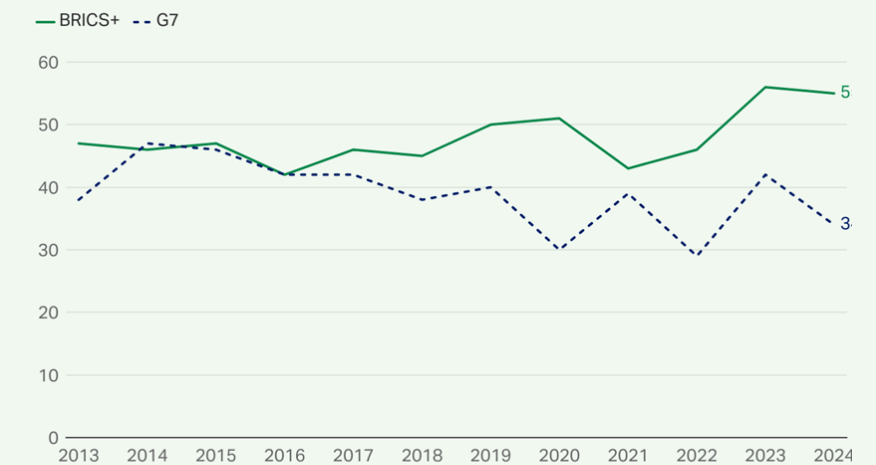
Countries where national institution questions cannot be asked are not shown.

Data are pooled across 2006-2024.

Chart B
BRICS See Brighter Economic Tomorrow Than G7 Countries

Right now, do you think that economic conditions in the city or area where you live, as a whole, are getting better or getting worse?

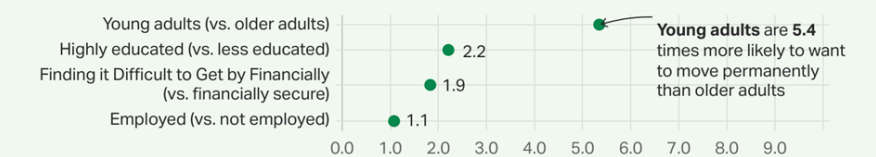
% Getting better (median)



BRICS countries: Brazil, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Russia, South Africa, United Arab Emirates. G7 countries: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, United Kingdom, United States of America.

Chart C
Brain Gain: Who Are Most Likely To Migrate?

Results from a logistic regression. Values show how many times more likely each group is to want to migrate permanently compared with its reference group (odds ratios).



All predictor variables were included in the model simultaneously. Model also controlled for geographic location, urbanicity, gender, and financial difficulty.

All results shown are significant at the $p < 0.001$ level

Supply Chain Resilience



THE NEW GEOGRAPHY OF INDUSTRY AND SUPPLY CHAIN RESILIENCE

The COVID-19 pandemic and other crises revealed critical vulnerabilities in global supply networks, prompting companies and governments to rethink industrial geography in order to build resilience and strategic self-reliance.

These themes are central to the work that Shilpan Amin oversees as Global Chief Procurement and Supply Chain Officer at General Motors. In a conversation with Steve Clemons, Editor at Large at The National Interest, Amin emphasized that true resilience depends on forward planning and real-time insights across every tier of the supply chain.

Key Takeaways

Automation Is Redefining the Economics of Globalization

For decades, globalization spread manufacturing across the world, drawn by low labor costs and the assumption of stable trade routes. The pandemic, rising geopolitical tensions, and shifting domestic priorities have exposed the risks of overreliance on distant suppliers. At the same time, advances in automation and machine learning are reshaping the production-cost equation. As Amin explained, “When you bring in technology like automation and machine learning capabilities into operations, you neutralize the competitiveness of what it takes to build parts around the world. When you layer on less logistics and less inventory, it can actually be more affordable to produce in North America for North American operations.”

As automation technologies advance, reshoring and nearshoring are poised to accelerate.

Public-Private Partnerships Are Key to Resilient Supply Chains

In a world increasingly dependent on rare minerals, semiconductors, and other critical components, both corporations and governments can no longer afford dependence on single suppliers, particularly amid mounting geopolitical tensions.

“It takes a long time to build a more resilient supply chain,”

Amin noted, underscoring the need for executives and policymakers to plan strategically for future disruptions. “Public and private sectors need to come together to have adequate scale and policy to drive a more resilient supply chain.”

Amin pointed to GM’s partnership with the Department of Defense and MP Materials Corp., the United States’ only active rare-earth mining company, as an example of collaboration designed to strengthen domestic production of rare-earth metals, alloys, and magnets.

Real-Time Visibility Is the Backbone of Resilience

“Resiliency is making sure you have more control over your supply chain—you know what’s coming and from where,” Amin explained.

For a global company like GM—with 20,000 suppliers across 100 countries and over \$100 billion in annual materials spend—visibility is not optional, it’s essential. In a crisis, every hour matters, and early insights can determine whether operations continue or stall. By deploying AI-driven event monitoring to detect and model risks from earthquakes to factory fires, companies can strengthen their ability to anticipate and absorb disruptions, achieving the kind of true, dynamic resilience demanded by today’s global economy.

Next Steps

Building resilient supply chains requires sustained collaboration among industry leaders, policymakers, and technology partners. Companies should prioritize investments in automation, data analytics, and AI-driven visibility tools to improve real-time risk detection and decision-making. Expanding public-private partnerships, especially in areas like rare-earth materials and semiconductors, can help diversify sources and reduce strategic dependencies. At the same time, organizations must develop long-term strategies to balance cost efficiency with resilience. Continued dialogue among corporate, government, and academic stakeholders will be essential to shaping the next generation of industrial geography and ensuring supply networks remain agile amid future disruptions.

(From Left to Right) Steve Clemons, Editor at Large, The National Interest interviews Shilpan Amin, Global Chief Procurement and Supply Chain Officer, General Motors.

BUILDING RESILIENCE IN U.S. CYBERSECURITY

As cyberattacks grow more sophisticated, cybersecurity has moved to the center of America's security strategy. In conversation with Meridian's Kellee Wicker, Vice President of the Center for Technology, Innovation, and Space, the Honorable Sean Cairncross, United States National Cyber Director, outlined the administration's vision for strengthening the nation's cyber posture, emphasizing industry collaboration and global alliances.

Key Takeaways

Public-private partnerships are indispensable to a robust cybersecurity posture.

Effective cyber defense requires a whole-of-government approach; however, government coordination alone is not enough. U.S. critical infrastructure, from energy to transportation to communication and more, is largely owned and operated by the private sector, making those public-private partnerships indispensable to a robust cybersecurity posture. Director Cairncross emphasized the need to work with specific sectors to eliminate friction points in the regulatory environment and align incentive structures, noting a shift away from "a compliance checklist." He argued that cybersecurity must be elevated from an IT concern to a boardroom priority, calling for CEO-level engagement to ensure that resources and attention are aligned with the scale of the threat.

CISA 2015 Reauthorization Top Priority for Administration

Collaboration must be reinforced not only through dialogue but also through policy. Central to this effort is the reauthorization of the Cybersecurity Information Sharing Act of 2015 (CISA 2015). CISA 2015 promotes greater information sharing by providing liability and

antitrust protections to industry. The administration is committed to a ten-year clean reauthorization of CISA 2015, describing it as essential for national security and for building trust between sectors.

Cybersecurity is a global challenge that requires global cooperation

Cybersecurity extends far beyond national borders. In addition to deepening collaboration across federal agencies and the private sector, strong international partnerships are vital to the success of cybersecurity strategies. Renewed effort is needed to deter adversaries and reshape the global risk calculus for states that engage in cyber aggression, including China, which is of particular concern due to its export of surveillance technologies. Global partnerships are essential to this vision. Through established networks like Five Eyes and emerging alliances around the world, the Office of the National Cyber Director aims to advance a "clean American tech stack" to promote a trusted and transparent digital ecosystem.

Next Steps

To tackle these important facets of cybersecurity, the ONCD will roll out a new National Cyber Strategy that will be concise and emphasize practical solutions, regulatory clarity, and global cooperation. While the details are still forthcoming, one thing is certain: strong collaboration between the U.S. government, the private sector, and international partners will be essential to ensure a more secure future.



The Honorable Sean Cairncross, U.S. National Cyber Director, in conversation with Kellee Wicker, Vice President for Technology, Innovation, and Space, Meridian International Center.

SHAPING THE AI FRONTIER: STANDARDS, SOVEREIGNTY, AND SECURITY



Gerry Petrella, General Manager, U.S. Public Policy, Microsoft

The White House's newly unveiled AI Action Plan seeks to strengthen U.S. leadership in artificial intelligence by advancing innovation, setting global standards, investing in domestic infrastructure, and expanding exports of the American AI technology stack. In a conversation between Gerry Petrella, General Manager for U.S. Public Policy at Microsoft, and Ben Brody, Technology Reporter at Punchbowl News, participants explored how the plan, announced in July 2025, redefines technological sovereignty and global influence. The export of integrated AI systems—combining chips, cloud infrastructure, models, and applications—is a core instrument of tech diplomacy that promotes openness, transparency, and free-enterprise values worldwide.

Key Takeaways

A whole-of-government approach is essential for successful AI diffusion

For the United States to expand the reach of its AI technologies, federal agencies must coordinate efforts across financial, development, and trade instruments. "One of the most critical things that the export AI program could do is leverage the US government's various tools... using vehicles like the Export-Import Bank and the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, to bring AI to parts of the world that may not have it yet" explained Microsoft's Gerry Petrella. Leveraging such tools and other agencies could accelerate access to American AI solutions in emerging markets and allied nations and ensure that access to AI is spread equally.

Stability and predictability underpin effective AI export strategy

Long-term global adoption of American AI depends on a stable and transparent export control framework that provides businesses with clarity and confidence. Earlier efforts to establish a diffusion plan centered on a tiered approach to allies and partners resulted in confusion

and showcased the importance of stability. "Nobody likes to be tier two," explained Petrella. A consistent regulatory environment will enable U.S. firms to build lasting international partnerships while protecting national interests.

Winning the AI race requires both superior technology and compelling messaging.

Beyond technical excellence, the United States must clearly communicate that adopting American AI also means gaining American partnership—through investments in education, skills training, infrastructure, and shared innovation. By pairing world-class products with a narrative of collaboration and mutual benefit, the U.S. can strengthen trust and ensure that its AI leadership reflects shared democratic values.

As Petrella stressed, "We need to send a signal that we want to work with our allies and work with partners abroad to bring AI infrastructure and AI tools."

Next Steps

Advancing U.S. leadership in artificial intelligence will require translating strategic vision into coordinated action. The next phase should focus on operationalizing the AI Action Plan through sustained interagency collaboration, public-private partnerships, and international engagement. Clear, consistent export guidelines and transparent governance frameworks will be essential to foster global trust while safeguarding national interests. At the same time, the U.S. must deepen cooperation with allies and partners to align on standards, security, and responsible AI deployment. By coupling innovation with diplomacy and capacity building, the United States can ensure that the global AI ecosystem reflects democratic values, shared prosperity, and long-term technological resilience.

THE FUTURE OF PAYMENTS MODERNIZATION AND THE IMPACT OF ECONOMIC INNOVATION



(From Left to Right) Jacob Chappell, Group Product Manager, QuickBooks Payments Money Team, Intuit; Bryan Bossin, Head of Government Relations and External Affairs, Interac Corp.; Bernard Boutin, Head of Corporate Affairs, Canada and LATAM, Intuit

As global economies undergo rapid digital transformation, countries from India to Canada to the United States are reimagining how money moves, undertaking ambitious efforts to modernize their payments systems. Bryan Bossin, Head of Government Relations and External Affairs at Interac Corp., Bernard Boutin, Head of Corporate Affairs, Canada and LATAM at Intuit and Jacob Chappell, Group Product Manager, QuickBooks Payments Money Team at Intuit, discussed the importance of payment modernization, and how it can be a linchpin for economic productivity and competitiveness.

Key Takeaways

When it comes to payments, faster is better

Real-time payments are not merely a matter of convenience. For small businesses, instant payment can mean "the difference between doing two jobs in a day and doing four," as highlighted by Intuit's Jacob Chappell. Small businesses account for a large portion of economies worldwide. When multiplied across millions of enterprises, this acceleration can add billions to GDP and strengthen national productivity. For Canada alone, payments modernization could generate between \$3–7 billion annually in new economic output.

Real-time payment systems can be a game changer

Payment modernization is not just about speed but also access, specifically regarding to non-bank financial institutions. There is often a regulatory mismatch between this technology and access. While the U.S. has launched real-time payment rails—the underlying systems facilitating the movement of funds—non-bank financial institutions face limited access to this infrastructure. Canada, by contrast, has modernized its regulatory framework through the Retail Payment Activities Act and

the Canadian Payments Act, extending system access to fintech companies while maintaining financial sector safeguards, though its real-time payments network is not yet operational and is expected to deploy next year.

Allowing fintech companies to become full members of systems like Payments Canada or to access the U.S. Federal Reserve's FedNow service, with the ability to directly participate in real-time payments, is key to spurring innovation and enhancing user experience. Adoption depends heavily on ease of use—technology must be intuitive and seamless to encourage widespread uptake and foster market growth.

As Mr. Chappell observed, "Ease of use wins ten times out of ten. It beats free most of the time."

International frameworks like India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) demonstrate the potential of an accessible real-time payment system, processing over 650 million transactions daily and catalyzing one of the world's fastest-growing digital economies.

Next Steps

Real-time payment systems are an essential pillar of modern financial infrastructure, capable of unlocking billions in economic output and driving shared prosperity. Advancing real-time payments will require coordinated action to expand access, streamline regulation, and prioritize intuitive design. Promoting both accessibility and ease of use is essential to unlock the full potential of the digital economy and ensure that small businesses can reap the benefits of this technology.

POWERING THE FUTURE: AI, NUCLEAR & SCALABLE ENERGY INNOVATION



Dr. Ben Reinke, Senior Vice President, Global Business Development and Deputy Chief Commercial Officer, X-Energy

Artificial intelligence is driving an unprecedented surge in global power demand. In 2023, data centers consumed an estimated 4.4% of all U.S. electricity, and AI-related energy use is projected to triple by 2028. Meeting this exponential growth requires a fundamental rethinking of how energy is generated and scaled. At the Meridian Summit, Ben Reinke of X-Energy and Craig Sundstrom of Amazon Web Services outlined how advanced nuclear technologies—particularly modular Generation IV reactors—can provide the clean, reliable, and scalable power needed to sustain the AI revolution. Their insights underscored the convergence of technological innovation, infrastructure investment, and decarbonization strategy essential to powering the digital economy's next phase.

Key Takeaways

AI growth compounds energy demand

The exponential expansion of AI requires energy systems that can scale in both capacity and reliability. Strategic investments in advanced nuclear technologies, complemented by renewable energy, are emerging as vital to delivering the firm, low-carbon power that sustainable AI operations demand. As Reinke noted, “There’s never been a greater economic opportunity than what AI is enabling in the marketplace.... We’re not keeping up yet—we’ve got to accelerate,” underscoring the urgency of scaling clean energy alongside AI’s rapid adoption and the consequent opportunities for growth.

Public-private collaboration fuels progress

Partnerships among corporations, utilities, and technology developers are driving the next generation of clean energy solutions. By combining private capital with infrastructure innovation, early projects are evolving into scalable models for growth that align technological leadership, economic competitiveness,

and environmental responsibility.

Scalability unlocks grid-wide impact

Modular Generation IV nuclear reactors offer a new level of flexibility, with smaller, repeatable units capable of scaling up to gigawatt-level output. X-Energy’s design uses TRISO fuel, a robust fuel that “can never melt under any scenario,” and a modular architecture that allows up to twelve 80-megawatt reactors to operate from a single control room. These attributes accelerate deployment, reduce infrastructure risk, and integrate directly into regional power grids, decarbonizing entire ecosystems while meeting the evolving needs of AI-driven industries.

Next Steps

To fully harness AI’s transformative potential, energy infrastructure must continue evolving through public-private partnerships, targeted investments, and supportive, agile policy frameworks. Modular nuclear reactors, paired with renewable energy, offer a path to reliable, low-carbon power that can support both technological growth and climate goals. Success depends on continuous learning from early projects, translating lessons into scaled deployments, and fostering collaboration across industry, government, and technology sectors.

As Sundstrom highlighted, “These are first-of-a-kind deployments... so the lessons we learn in initial projects will translate to further successes down the road.”

Aligning innovation with infrastructure and sustainability will be essential to powering the AI revolution and consequent industrial growth for decades to come.

CHARTING THE FUTURE OF TRUSTED SECURITY COOPERATION

As global security threats become more complex, ranging from emerging technologies to renewed great-power competition, the importance of trusted international alliances is greater than ever. With global military expenditures rising to record levels and spending going up by 37 percent between 2015 and 2024, how America is approaching security cooperation was the focus of a discussion moderated by Roy Kapani, Trustee at Meridian International Center, Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins, Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security (2021-2024). With tensions escalating in the Asia-Pacific, open conflict continuing in Europe, and a fragile ceasefire in the Middle East, America’s approach to security cooperation is top of mind for partners and allies around the world.

Key Takeaways

New Challenges Require New Partnerships

The AUKUS partnership between the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia reflects a modern approach to alliance-building in the Indo-Pacific. Structured around two main pillars—the development of nuclear-powered submarines, and collaboration in advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and 5G—AUKUS represents both a technological leap and a diplomatic milestone. Serving as a model for how the West can face new global challenges together, it combines strategic deterrence with responsible innovation and respect for non-proliferation norms. “AUKUS is a new way of trying to do things by looking at which countries are the best ones to work with, who has the type of technology that would be helpful, and working across a number of countries, in this case, originally three, and hopefully even more in the future” explained Ambassador Jenkins.

Strong Extended Nuclear Deterrence as Strategic Assurance to Allies

America’s extended nuclear deterrence serves a multipurpose role in today’s landscape, from deterrence of potential adversaries, to underpinning regional



(From Left to Right) Roy Kapani, Chairman and CEO, SEACORP; The Honorable Bonnie Jenkins, Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security (2021-2024)

security around the world and preventing the further proliferation of nuclear weapons. “We need to ensure that countries know that we have their backs and that they don’t need to develop nuclear weapons” advised Ambassador Jenkins, adding, “it’s always important to reinforce that commitment so that countries under the nuclear umbrella ... understand that our commitment is ironclad.” With such high stakes, there is little room for ambiguity.

Trust and Transparency Complement Deterrence

Dialogue and engagement with neighbors, partners, and multilateral institutions are vital to ensure that publics and governments are informed of your intentions and the scope of your collaboration. Transparency is not a vulnerability, but a strength—essential for maintaining cooperation and credibility among partners and the public, as well as clarity about boundaries with adversaries. Multilateral institutions also play a critical role in sustaining trust. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), for example, continues to monitor and report on AUKUS implementation, helping ensure compliance and build confidence across the international community. These mechanisms clarify intent and establish new standards for responsible integration of emerging technologies into global security frameworks.

Next Steps

Governments must enhance coordination among defense, diplomatic, and private sectors, developing frameworks that promote innovation while maintaining essential safeguards. Ongoing communication with partners and allies will be vital to preserving confidence, especially amid shifting geopolitical dynamics and domestic political transitions. To maintain global stability, nations must reaffirm their commitment to deterrence, strengthen long-term partnerships, and invest in systems that enable effective cooperation to ensure that greater militarization does not lead to greater global instability.

AI'S FUTURE DEPENDS ON WHAT WE BUILD TODAY: People, Policy, & Partnerships

By: Nicole Isaac, Vice President for Global Public Policy at Cisco

Artificial intelligence, in only a short span of time, has transformed from promise to power—fast becoming an important part of the global economy.

What makes Cisco distinctive in this story is not only our innovation at the edge of AI, but also our work to securely connect the entire AI ecosystem: from the networks that power AI, to securing the AI lifecycle, to the people who help shape its impact. This gives us a unique vantage point across the AI stack.

But perspective comes with responsibility. For us, AI's success is measured not only in technical performance but in whether it expands opportunity, strengthens resilience, and earns trust. We believe that without secure, intelligent connectivity, AI cannot operate at scale. And without strategic investment in people and policies, it risks becoming another divider rather than a unifier.

Our research and partnerships tell a consistent story: AI and connectivity are two sides of the same coin. AI can enhance the networks it depends on by making them more sustainable, resilient, and secure. Connectivity, in turn, can determine whether AI's benefits reach just a few markets or billions of people. In Africa, for instance, where three-quarters of the population will soon be under 35, AI could add nearly USD 3 trillion to the economy by 2030. And investments in secure infrastructure, bold public-private partnerships, and a workforce trained to innovate responsibly can all help realize that future.

What excites me most is that these choices are still in our hands. Governments can adopt forward-looking AI policies that spur innovation while centering people. Industry can embed AI into networks to help reduce energy consumption and expand access. And all of us can work with civil society to help ensure that AI reflects human values. I believe that if we align on these imperatives, AI will not only modernize systems but also redefine how societies connect, learn, and grow.

Cisco's commitment is clear: we are investing in secure networks that give AI a trusted foundation; in partnerships that scale skills and opportunity; and in governance frameworks that put security and ethics at the center.

We believe that success in the AI era will be defined by building a future that lasts.

For deeper insights, I invite you to explore three resources that Cisco collaborated on with the International Telecommunication Union, Analysys Mason, and Access Partnership, respectively.

Together, these resources reflect a simple truth: AI's story is not inevitable. It is being written by the choices we make today—about people, about policies, and about partnerships. Cisco is committed to writing that story alongside you.

***Connecting the Future:
How Connectivity and AI Unlock
New Potential***



***AI for Connectivity:
How Policymakers Can Help Digitalisation***



***AI and the Workforce in Africa:
Realizing the Region's Potential***



STRATEGIC ASSETS: GEOPOLITICAL BARGAINING CHIPS IN A NEW GLOBAL ECONOMY



(From Left to Right) Jessica Dean | Host, CNN Newsroom; Jarrod Agen, Deputy Assistant to the President and Executive Director, National Energy Dominance Council; The Honorable Summer Mersinger, CEO, Blockchain Association; Nicole Isaac, Vice President, Global Public Policy, Government Affairs, Cisco

Today's strategic advantage is being redefined by a handful of interlocking assets—energy, AI infrastructure, secure data, and digital currencies—and by the policy choices that shape how those assets flow across borders. This was a central theme in a panel discussion featuring Jarrod Agen, Deputy Assistant to the President and Executive Director, National Energy Dominance Council; Nicole Isaac, Vice President - Global Public Policy, Cisco; Summer Mersinger, CEO, Blockchain Association; and moderated by Jessica Dean of CNN. Panelists described a world in which LNG exports, resilient and modern electricity grids, data centers, and dollar-backed stablecoins are not just commercial issues but core instruments of statecraft. Private-sector leaders heard a clear message: commercial strategy must now align with national energy policy, export controls, and global infrastructure planning if companies want reliable access to AI scale and the markets that depend on it.

Key Takeaways

Energy and AI drive strategic power

Energy and AI have become inseparable pillars of strategic leverage.

Agen emphasized that, “energy is the coolest thing on the planet because energy is essential to all of the great tech developments happening with AI.”

The convergence of energy availability, grid stability, and AI infrastructure is reshaping diplomacy and commerce alike. Isaac stressed the “need to generate the power we need to fulfill the data centers and AI but not pull from the consumer.” In this context, data centers have emerged as national infrastructure critical to AI deployment, requiring concentrated computing, secure data flows, and abundant electricity. Isaac added that “where data is stored matters,” with cloud-based, secure architectures offering scalability and security at national scale. Together, control over energy and data confers outsized influence in the emerging global economy and statecraft.

Overcoming barriers to unlocking U.S. LNG

U.S. gas exports are in high demand as allies seek to reduce Russian dependence and serve as a critical example of how infrastructure investment and regulatory reform directly impact strategic energy exports. Liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports have become both

an economic opportunity and a tool of geopolitical partnership. However, the ability to capitalize on this potential hinges on overcoming significant bottlenecks, such as slow permitting processes, inadequate port and pipeline infrastructure, and regulatory uncertainty. Streamlining these processes and investing in modernized energy infrastructure are essential steps to expand export capacity efficiently and sustainably.

Stablecoins widen market access—if dollar-backed

Digital currencies—particularly stablecoins—are strategic tools reshaping financial inclusion and global trade. Dollar-pegged tokens can rapidly onboard emerging economies into global finance and offer immediate access to U.S. dollar liquidity and a pathway into global payments and trade. Mersinger noted that “we had the president sign the GENIUS Act into law a few months ago and that really provided the clarity we needed to make sure that stablecoins continue to be issued with that US dollar backing,” maintaining U.S. leadership in digital assets to ensure innovators don't relocate to more favorable jurisdictions. Besides financial implications, there are promising innovations where blockchain infrastructure could stabilize energy grids when aligned with renewables, enriching the nexus of technology and sustainability.

Next Steps

To advance strategic asset management, private-sector leaders should accelerate partnerships with energy producers and grid operators to secure reliable and affordable power. Active engagement in public-private consortia is critical to drive permitting reform and infrastructure investment that expands energy exports, including U.S. LNG, and supports resilient AI data centers. Companies must adopt secure, cloud-native data architectures that balance sovereignty with scalability. Additionally, leveraging digital currencies within clear regulatory frameworks will expand financial inclusion and fortify U.S. leadership in digital assets. Policymakers must next look to codify recent executive reforms to streamline approvals, ensure permitting certainty, and incentivize infrastructure upgrades. Organizations that integrate energy, data, and policy collaboration with strategic foresight will be best positioned to wield influence and maintain competitiveness in the evolving global economy.



PAYMENTS MODERNIZATION: BUILDING ECONOMIC RESILIENCE & SHAPING GEOPOLITICAL FUTURES

Provided by Intuit

Across the globe, small businesses are navigating a perfect storm—rising inflation, labor shortages, and the escalating cost of goods. In this environment, access to capital and operational efficiency are not luxuries—they’re lifelines.

Yet, the financial infrastructure underpinning how small businesses move money often lags behind the digital world we are all living in.

In the United States and beyond, small enterprises are constrained by slow, costly, and fragmented payment systems that restrict cash flow and inhibit growth. Payment delays can mean the difference between expanding a team or missing payroll, restocking inventory or losing customers. The need for modernization is urgent—and the opportunity to build upon global progress is immense.

Countries like Canada are charting ambitious Payments Modernization Initiatives to build a faster, safer, and more data-rich payment ecosystem. The efforts of policymakers, financial institutions, and innovators—under the leadership of the Bank of Canada and Payments Canada—are reshaping how businesses move money. The forthcoming Real-Time Rail system will empower Canadian small businesses with instant access to funds, driving productivity and competitiveness in a digital economy. This progress deserves recognition—and emulation.

By granting trusted payment service providers broader access to core financial infrastructure, as Canada has championed, nations can reduce transaction costs, accelerate settlements, and unlock innovation for small businesses worldwide. The result: more consumer choice, innovation, and stronger global competitiveness.

“Payments modernization has the potential to transform how entrepreneurs and small businesses participate in the digital economy. By enabling faster, more secure, and data-driven transactions, modern payment systems improve cash flow, expand access to credit, and foster innovation. Small businesses in countries that embrace real-time payments and open banking will be better equipped to compete globally,”

shared Juliana Berger, Director of Product Management, QuickBooks Payments.

In an interconnected world where economic strength and digital trust shape geopolitical influence, payments modernization has become a strategic imperative. The nations leading in secure, real-time, and interoperable payment systems are not just advancing technology—they are defining new frontiers of economic diplomacy and resilience. By modernizing financial infrastructure, countries empower their entrepreneurs, strengthen sovereignty, and help shape a more inclusive and stable global economy.



Punchbowl News is the premier membership based news community covering Power, People and Politics in Washington D.C. Founded by journalists and best-selling authors Jake Sherman and Anna Palmer, and co-founded by veteran Capitol Hill reporter John Bresnahan, Punchbowl News focuses relentlessly on the people in Washington who make decisions and the news and events that will move political markets.

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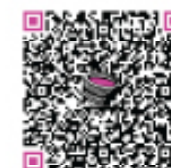
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GEOECONOMIC CONFRONTATIONS: SOVEREIGNTY, STRATEGY, AND GLOBAL COOPERATION

Rapid shifts in trade, strategy, and the rise of new economic powers are redefining the contours of global competition and cooperation. In a conversation moderated by Deborah Lehr, Interim CEO of Meridian, panelists explored how nations and other global actors are navigating these changes. Distinguished speakers Dina Powell McCormick, Vice Chair of BDT & MSD Partners, Paige Willey, Deputy Assistant to the President and Deputy Director of the National Economic Council, and His Excellency Jose Manuel Romualdez, Ambassador of the Republic of the Philippines to the U.S. brought perspectives from business, national economic policy, and diplomacy to examine the intersection of national interests, economic sovereignty, and global cooperation. In an era of rapid technological and geopolitical change, agility, foresight, and collaboration are essential for both national and corporate actors.

Key Takeaways

Opportunity emerges from crisis

Disruption, while uncomfortable, can be a catalyst for progress. Powell McCormick pointed to recent developments in the Middle East, where coordinated international efforts have stabilized conflict zones and enabled new avenues for economic engagement, in addition to unprecedented investments in new technologies. Similarly, Southeast Asia is experiencing rapid growth, with countries like the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam exploring partnerships in critical minerals and emerging technology sectors. Geopolitical and economic upheavals can create opportunities for strategic investments, new trade relationships, and regional collaboration that advance both stability and prosperity.

The private sector as a stabilizing force

Corporate diplomacy and private capital are playing an increasingly vital role alongside government policy. Powell McCormick described “massive capital outlays with AI and the energy sources required and

the compute power” driving a new industrial boom. Willey stressed that investment in advanced industries “revitalizes manufacturing and fortifies domestic supply chains,” underscoring the United States’ “unbelievably productive” workforce and high-value operations being attracted back home. The synergy of private investment and policy has become a key driver of innovation, employment, and supply chain resilience.

Middle powers are finding leverage amid strategic competition

Ambassador Jose Manuel Romualdez illustrated how nations like the Philippines are leveraging long-standing relationships with the United States to balance pressures from China while pursuing economic growth, demonstrating the value of deliberate, resilient policymaking in a complex geopolitical environment. Economic security and defense security are inseparable, and partnerships on critical minerals, trade, and infrastructure are creating new opportunities for ASEAN economies. Ambassador Romualdez highlighted how the Indo-Pacific’s economic dynamism offers space for cooperation among “like-minded nations” despite intensifying geopolitical pressures.

Next Steps

As global economic power continues to shift, nations and businesses must adopt a forward-looking, integrated approach. For cross-sector leaders, this means prioritizing partnerships that align economic, technological, and geopolitical interests while remaining agile in response to market and policy disruptions. Staying informed on the evolving geoeconomic horizon—and where private capital is flowing—will be essential to anticipating new opportunities and risks. By understanding how crises can create openings for growth, fostering high-value domestic capabilities, and leveraging both multilateral and public-private collaboration, stakeholders can navigate today’s geoeconomic confrontations to achieve stability and prosperity tomorrow.



(From Left to Right Clockwise) Deborah Lehr, Interim CEO, Meridian International Center; H.E. Jose Manuel G. Romualdez, Ambassador of the Philippines to the U.S.; The Honorable Dina Powell McCormick, Vice Chair, President, and Head of Global Client Services, BDT & MSD Partner; Paige Willey, Deputy Assistant to the President for Economic Policy and Deputy Director, White House National Economic Council



WHY AMERICA NEEDS A NEW DIPLOMACY PLAYBOOK

By Frank Justice, Vice President of Open Diplomacy at Meridian International Center

Headlines reflect a complex global environment: foreign aid budgets are under review, trade negotiations are intensifying, and international agreements are evolving. For many, these dynamics underscore the importance of sustaining and adapting American leadership in a changing world.

But what if this disruption is not a retreat, but an inflection point? What if it is less about the end of U.S. influence and more about the failure of our old diplomatic tools to keep pace with the world they helped shape?

For decades, American power abroad has been equated with government-led diplomacy—treaty negotiations, embassy briefings, and formal alliances. These institutions were critical in building the postwar

order. But the nature of influence has changed. Power now moves through networks, not hierarchies. It flows through cities, companies, scientists, artists, and cultural figures. It is exercised not only in closed rooms in Washington and foreign capitals, but also on digital platforms, sports fields, concert stages, and factory floors.

Traditional diplomatic forums are often too slow, too rigid, and too limited in scope to meet these challenges. Summits and treaties still matter, but they are increasingly insufficient on their own.

Meanwhile, other actors have filled the vacuum. Mayors negotiate deals. Tech firms shape geopolitical realities through infrastructure and data flows. Athletes and artists bridge cultural divides. These actors are not ancillary;

they are now central players in international relations.

To sustain U.S. leadership in this environment, we need a new diplomatic playbook—one that recognizes that influence is shared, not centralized.

Call it Open Diplomacy: a collaborative, distributed model of international engagement that brings together state and non-state actors to pursue shared objectives.

Like open-source software, Open Diplomacy thrives on transparency, collaboration, and adaptability. Cities, companies, cultural leaders, and civil society organizations bring agility and innovation that traditional diplomacy often lacks. Governments, in turn, provide legitimacy, resources, and strategic direction. When these forces are aligned, they can act with greater speed and reach than either could alone.

Subnational diplomacy is becoming increasingly important as national governments confront various challenges. Cities and states are taking on a more prominent role creating sophisticated international strategies that include partnerships and investment deals. Local leaders are actively driving international engagement, which directly benefits their constituents and enhances U.S. influence from the ground up.

Technology is another critical frontier. Tech companies are now recognized as geopolitical actors, with fields like artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and space representing new arenas of power. Governments must learn to collaborate with innovators, not only regulate them, to help shape global norms and rules.

Culture and sports are also powerful, often underestimated tools of diplomacy. These arenas create opportunities for collaborative engagement that can transcend political divides, cultivate trust, and reach audiences that traditional diplomacy rarely touches.

This shift is not about sidelining diplomats. U.S. embassies and foreign ministries must become hubs for collaboration, convening networks of leaders from business, technology, culture, and civil society. Training future diplomats must involve equipping them to navigate these overlapping spheres, not just bilateral negotiations.

As the world becomes less hierarchical and more networked, influence will belong to those who can coordinate across boundaries, not just control them. Nations that cling to twentieth-century diplomatic models will find themselves outpaced by crises and outmaneuvered by more agile actors.

Open Diplomacy is a strategic imperative.

By embracing it, the U.S. can renew its global leadership for a new era—one defined not by a single center of power, but by the strength of many working in concert.

“Geopolitical forces are disrupting diplomacy. Business, states and cities, and sports and culture can sustain its future.” –

**The Honorable Stuart W. Holliday,
Chief Executive Officer, Meridian
International Center (2006-2025)**

FROM THE LAST FRONTIER TO THE NEXT: ECONOMIC RENEWAL AND GLOBAL STRATEGY IN ALASKA

Foreign direct investment is a driving force for economic renewal across the United States, as states and cities harness their unique regional strengths to compete on the global stage. Alaska exemplifies this dynamic, as highlighted during a Meridian Summit fireside moderated by Edward Luce, U.S. National Security Editor for the *Financial Times*, with Governor Mike Dunleavy, discussing the state's rich reserves of critical minerals and energy, alongside growing capabilities in advanced manufacturing, infrastructure, and technology. The state is actively forging international partnerships and implementing strategic initiatives essential to both national growth and security. A testament to this focus is the Trump administration's first Executive Order, titled "Unleashing Alaska's Potential," designed to empower the state to capitalize on its vast mineral and natural resources. Historical milestones, such as Alaska's pioneering role with the first LNG export facility in North America—celebrated by Governor Dunleavy during the 50th anniversary in Japan in 2019—underscore Alaska's enduring strategic importance.

Key Takeaways

Strategic Resources with National Security Implications

The State of Alaska is actively engaging with the federal government to secure access and develop its vast deposits of critical minerals and rare earth elements essential for America and its allies, including graphite, copper, zinc, and gold. Governor Dunleavy highlighted the historic overreliance on foreign sources, noting,

"[In the past] we've outsourced our national security to China when it comes to these critical minerals; [now the conversation] is how do we get more processing and refinement done here in America to safeguard our national security."

Attracting Transformative New Investment

Alaska is actively pursuing investment for both extraction and processing of critical minerals, alongside innovation in sustainable energy. The state exemplifies how U.S. governors and local leaders are key economic ambassadors, building international partnerships across Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Through their international delegations and missions, diplomatic and corporate engagement, they cultivate the long-term relationships that attract critical foreign direct investment and strengthen broad economic and security goals.

Cross-Border Collaboration and Geography as a Strategic Asset

Whether at the border or in the Arctic, state and local governments can leverage geography as a source of strategic strength. With the Arctic warming and new shipping routes opening, Alaska leverages its unique geographic position to establish itself both as a commercial gateway and a defense hub of the future. As Governor Dunleavy emphasized, "Our history with the Canadians goes back a long time. We're joined at the hip with Yukon, and get along well with Yukoners, British Columbia, and Alberta." Developments such as

the Nome deepwater Arctic port and strong bilateral cooperation with Canadian provinces reinforce Alaska's role as a critical node in infrastructure, trade, and security networks shaping the future of the Arctic and North America.

Forging the Future

Every state and local government across the U.S. holds a distinct card to play on the global stage. Alaska's hand is formidable—and like others—it drives pragmatic

and enduring international cooperation rooted in its strategic, geographic, and historic position.

By telling a story of resilience, opportunity, and strategic value, Alaska is charting a course for how U.S. states can shape global economic and security outcomes. Governor Dunleavy continues to work with federal partners and international investors to advance this vision, linking local prosperity with America's broader mission of economic renewal and global competitiveness.



The Honorable Mike Dunleavy, Governor of Alaska, speaks at the 2025 Meridian Summit.

