

# WIN WITHOUT WAR



## Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

*Intel for Advocacy*

DATE: November 17, 2022

SL: Midterm Reflections

### **The Takeaway:**

- With Democrats retaining a majority in the Senate and Republicans likely to control the House, we can expect legislative gridlock for the foreseeable future.
- On the downside, progressives will be playing more defense in the House, which likely becomes a laboratory for dangerous rhetoric and disastrous policy. On the upside, there will still be opportunities to move good, if more limited, measures forward, and to continue organizing around bold ideas and legislation.
- Pre-election, the conventional wisdom was pummeling our allies for maintaining a transformative vision despite serious political headwinds. Instead, election night again underscored that progressive values – in defense of democracy, reproductive justice, and anti-racism – are galvanizing. This is a lesson we need to hold on to as we continue to push for a more progressive, peaceful foreign policy.

### **Midterm Reflections: Assessing the Historically Muddled, and Still Not Quite Over, 2022 Elections**

As of November 17, Democrats have retained their slim, 50-vote “majority” in the U.S. Senate, and they could pick up an outright majority in December’s runoff elections in Georgia. Republicans are [projected](#) to control the House of Representatives with a majority they could count on one hand.

The most immediate impact of this national vote will occur in the coming weeks, not months. Senate Democratic leadership will feel a little less pressed to rush through as many administration nominees as possible in the lame duck session, and may let the processes governing two “must-pass” bills, the National Defense Authorization Act and an annual appropriations package, unfold a little more smoothly, while pursuing other standalone legislation (as we’re already seeing with the [Respect for Marriage Act](#)). And of course, leadership elections for both parties in both chambers will stir plenty of DC pots, with reporters likely to outline recriminations among Republicans and a possible generational shift in Democratic House leadership in their daily newsletters.

If Democrats get a 51st Senate seat, they’ll have outright majorities across Senate committees, reducing the procedural [hurdles](#) to getting both the president’s nominees and more partisan

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legislation to the floor. More procedural clarity in the Senate, however, won't change where Congress is likely heading overall: gridlock, with the Senate frustrating the aims of a Republican-controlled House and vice versa.

Following a rougher-than-expected election night, House Republicans have a [choice](#) in front of them. There is a world in which Republican leadership allows, for the sake of basic governance, certain key bills to advance with the support of a slice of party moderates that squeaked through in purple or "lean blue" districts. The contemporary Republican party, however, has tended not to inhabit that world. Unless their underwhelming election returns have truly shaken up their strategy, we should expect "oversight" in the form of investigation upon investigation. Particularly pernicious could be [probes and public hearings](#) into the U.S. withdrawal of Afghanistan and U.S.-Mexico border policy, which will be venues for the right to stir up Islamophobia and racism while advocating for a return to, or expansion of, the civil rights- and refugee-undermining policies of the post-9/11 era.

Even as these manufactured dramas play out, a bright, silver lining will be the work of an augmented and energized progressive caucus. [New representatives](#), like Pennsylvania's Summer Lee and Florida's Maxwell Frost, will add to the growing chorus of congressional champions who center human rights, diplomacy, solidarity, and human dignity in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy.

## **Where we're going**

Prospects for the continued push to shape U.S. foreign policy in a more progressive direction are, like the election results, uneven. Bold, transformative legislation will likely be treated as organizing tools – policy ideas around which you slowly build support, so that key offices can enact them when the congressional winds (and whip counts) are in their favor, months or years from now. There will be efforts to see what gems – whether in support of refugees, or to rein in Pentagon corruption – can be embedded as amendments in the slow-rolling boulders of massive "must-pass" appropriations and authorizations bills. Hearings will become even more vital, as venues both for congressional allies to outline their alternatives to gridlock and for emerging experts to lay out their views of the (policy) world as it should be.

That approach is not so different from the one that advocates, even in more favorable times, are used to adopting. What has shifted, however, is the amount of defense that will have to be played against opponents hoping to use the House as a springboard to enact their own unacceptable policies – vaulting the Pentagon budget well past \$1 trillion, funneling weapons to human rights abusing governments, and rolling back U.S. commitments to international agreements and agencies that undergird nuclear non-proliferation or deliver aid to the world's disaster-stricken. These policies, even defeated in the Senate or overruled by a presidential

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veto, have to be contested every step of the way. If they're not marginalized now, then today's inflammatory legislative stunt risks becoming tomorrow's bipartisan compromise.

## Why we're here

Is it all grinding, gridlock-induced small ball from here on out? Not in the slightest. After all, in 2018 – when Trump was president and progressives were far from power – Win Without War helped coordinate with partners and key offices and a nationwide coalition of activists to [pass](#) a war powers resolution through the Senate that both cooled U.S. support for the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen and forced Yemen's warring parties to the table for their first talks in over two years. If you're reading this, you're likely a person that, in their day to day, focuses on what's possible – but you wouldn't be reading Win Without War's debriefs if you didn't want to transform how the United States engages with the rest of the world.

In the runup to last Tuesday, [conventional](#) wisdom was tending towards a massive defeat for progressives. [Commentators](#) accused progressive candidates and organizations of spending time and energy caring too much about protecting democracy at home and around the world, focusing too much on reproductive justice and righting the wrongs of the Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision, throwing themselves too hard into opposing the deadly outcomes of racist law enforcement practices. Voters would punish progressives for pressing too hard for policies to address these wrongs, and would cut us down to size by sweeping opponents of these values into power.

Instead, voters demonstrated what others can be quick to forget: that progressive values are galvanizing; that democracy, reproductive justice, and anti-racism have broad constituencies in the United States; and that holding to a transformative political horizon, regardless of immediate obstacles, is always good policy and good politics. No matter the political terrain, Win Without War and our allies will always hold to that approach in our efforts to build a more peaceful, progressive U.S. foreign policy.

**Correction:** In the last issue of the Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief, we incorrectly stated that a civil society [letter](#) urging the Biden administration to avoid supporting and armed intervention in Haiti included a call to “[drop] support for [acting Haitian prime minister Ariel] Henry and his de facto government.” The letter instead called for the administration to “reevaluate U.S. support” to Henry, emphasizing that an armed intervention would primarily benefit Henry's government, rather than lead to a political progress in Haiti. We apologize for the error.

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## Buried Ledes

**Colombia is trying to [end its revenue dependence on oil](#) exports**, with first-year President Gustavo Petro calling on the world for oil to be viewed as a poison. Currently, oil is responsible for one-fifth of the Colombian government's income. Petro has tasked his environment and energy ministers, both women with activist backgrounds, to reimagine Colombia's economy. Colombia already generates 80 percent of its energy from renewable energies, mostly hydropower, but oil makes up a large portion of the economy. Fossil fuel business elites are resisting Petro's proposals, but there is real momentum for climate action in Colombia.

Imprisoned **British-Egyptian dissident Alaa Abd El Fattah** has [ended his hunger strike](#) after seven months. He had been consuming 100 calories a day, but went on a complete hunger strike on November 1st and a water strike on November 6th at the start of the U.N.-inspired climate conference in Egypt. Western leaders brought up the issue with Sisi, but it remains unclear if he will be released. El Fattah was imprisoned in 2019, under accusations of spreading false information over social media regarding human rights abuses in Egyptian prisons.

The U.S. **Department of Justice** has [opened an investigation](#) into the killing of **al Jazeera journalist and U.S. citizen Shireen Abu Akleh** in the occupied West Bank by Israeli military forces on May 11th of this year. Advocacy groups in the U.S. have demanded such an investigation for months. Israeli defense minister Benny Gantz called the U.S. move to investigate the murder of its citizen a "grave mistake." Both the [New York Times](#) and the [United Nations](#) found that the shot that killed Abu Akleh came from an Israeli military convoy.

**Six people died from a deadly bombing in a crowded shopping street in Istanbul.** The Turkish government accused Kurdish militants crossing the Syrian border for the attack. Due to U.S. military partnership with Kurdish-led militias in Syria, [Turkey accused the U.S. of complicity](#) in the attack. Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soyly dismissed U.S. condolences, and a State Department spokesperson responded by calling Soyly's comments "irresponsible." The PKK, a Kurdish political and paramilitary group operating in Syria, denied involvement.

**The World Cup is only days away!** If you need a solid World Cup bracket to compete with your friends, [this one](#) from MLS soccer is the best. Hopefully you will have better luck than Budweiser - their beer stations have [gone into hiding](#) after a sudden edict from Qatari officials. Budweiser stands aren't the only ones going into hiding ahead of the World Cup: Manchester United (former) star Cristiano Ronaldo has not been seen on the field for the team in recent weeks, causing him to [throw accusations](#) of "disrespect" and "betrayal" familiar to mid-day soap operas.