TENNESSEE WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL

November 2026 Newsletter



Dr. Liane Hentschke
Executive Director

From the Executive Director

As we approach the end of 2026, I look back with great pride and gratitude on another remarkable year for the Tennessee World Affairs Council. This year, TNWAC presented 16 Distinguished Speaker Series events, bringing prominent experts and leaders to Nashville to discuss the international developments shaping our world. As the U.S. celebrates its 250th anniversary, several of our programs offered opportunities to reflect on American history, leadership, and foreign policy.

Our Summer–Fall season concluded with an outstanding conversation featuring Dr. James M. Lindsay of the Council on Foreign Relations, moderated by our Board Chair, Karl Dean. Their discussion, "The Best and the Worst: 250 Years of U.S. Foreign Policy," examined the successes, failures, and lessons of American foreign policy across different administrations. Other highlights included discussions on transatlantic trade and security, the Kurdish-American experience, and international economic relations. These events reinforced the importance of TNWAC as a nonpartisan forum for informed dialogue and diverse perspectives.

I am currently in Washington, D.C., attending the World Affairs Councils of America (WACA) National Conference with our Board Chair, Karl Dean, and Board Member Jim Shepherd. The conference brings together speakers and colleagues from across the country to exchange ideas on leadership, governance, and global challenges facing our communities. I am especially proud that Arlie Akers, a Lipscomb University student nominated by TNWAC, was selected as a WACA Student Scholar, and grateful to Dr. Susan Haynes for her support. This recognition reflects our commitment to developing the next generation of globally informed leaders.

Our recently formalized partnership with Lipscomb University represents another important step toward expanding educational opportunities and preparing Tennessee's students for careers in an increasingly international workforce.

We are finalizing an exciting Winter–Spring 2027 Distinguished Speaker Series, to be announced in December. The season opens on January 13 at AllianceBernstein with former Ambassador Louise Blais discussing "Shared Continent, Shifting Rules: What Comes Next for Canada and the United States."

My thanks to our Board, sponsors, members, and volunteers for making our work possible. As Thanksgiving approaches, let us reflect on what we have, friendships, and opportunities to make a difference in our communities. Wishing you and your families a peaceful and happy Thanksgiving!



Guest Columnist

The views and opinions expressed in our guest column are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Tennessee World Affairs Council.

The Importance of Understanding International Business Etiquette

Each day the size of our world shrinks. The search engines get faster, more highways are paved, companies go international. The professional landscape has never before operated in the manner it does today, and the increased globalization and interconnectedness of companies, humans and politics will only continue to grow. As our world continues to change, pushing ourselves to understand how to exist and connect in the international realm of business is not only beneficial for our companies, but for our overall global perspective and interpersonal connections. Through widening our scope on various cultures, we are able to avoid miscommunication, foster borderless trust and respect, and enhance successful negotiations.

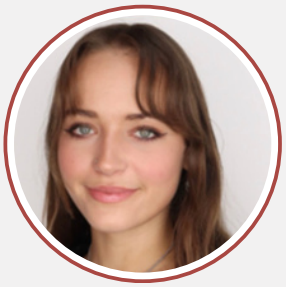
One of the most important concepts to understand when globally educating ourselves is the difference between an individualist culture, like what we see here in America, compared to a collectivist culture. These cultural ideologies are the backbone of how individuals of different societies interact with one another, their families, and within the workplace.

Individualist cultures place high value on individual identity, independence, and expressing personal opinion. We see that in the dynamic of North American workplaces, where individuals operate with attention to personal achievement. A collectivist culture on the other hand places a much higher value on interdependence, in-group loyalty, and representing group interests or opinions.

When understanding these differences some things we can look to are how a person presents themselves in a professional conversation. In America, being assertive, confident, and sure in your personal opinion is highly respected. In contrast, in collectivist cultures such as Japan, a more modest, calm, and humble attitude is seen. To add, in more collectivist societies, building personal relationships prior to handling formal business is extremely important. This aim to create interpersonal relationships is also seen through Japan's gift giving etiquette used when starting negotiations upon meeting and within companies twice a year. This is known as Ochugen, mid-year gratitude gifts, and Oseibom, year-end gifts for repaying favors.

The concept of direct and indirect communication is also very important when understanding how to interact in international workplaces. Direct communication is very common in individualist cultures, where goals are communicated honestly, and clearly, and there is a comfortability around confrontation. This contrasts to indirect communication in collectivist cultures such as China, where there is rather an overarching goal of maintaining peace, and thus nonverbal body language is extremely valued.

Together, we can learn to maintain a productive and peaceful work environment that harnesses trust and mutual benefits!



Jennifer Gheorghe

Jennifer is a TNWAC volunteer who recently graduated from Florida State University with a degree in both Psychology and International Affairs

Volunteer Spotlight: Savannah Wilson



By day, I'm a Global Change Manager, helping organizations and people navigate big changes across countries, cultures, and time zones. Outside of work, I enjoy volunteering with nonprofits focused on literacy, global education, and helping newcomers feel at home in Nashville.

As the daughter of an immigrant, I was taught early on that the world looks different depending on where you're standing. This early mindset led me to study international business and foreign languages, build a career connecting people across cultures, and get involved with organizations like TNWAC. In an international setting, I enjoy challenging people on their assumptions and perspectives, and helping groups find common ground.

My husband and I recently returned to Nashville after living and working in Paris, and brought home a new perspective along with a love of French bread and butter. When I'm not adding books to my unmanageable reading list, you'll probably find me exploring Nashville's food scene, hunting for cuisines I've never tried, or asking someone for a list of their favorite recommendations!

Announcing a new partnership

We are excited to announce our partnership with Lipscomb University, reflecting our shared commitment to education, civic engagement, and global awareness.



President of Lipscomb University, Dr. Candice McQueen and Chairman of the Board of TNWAC, Karl Dean, signed the partnership agreement.



In Memoriam: Dr. Debbie Barnard



The Tennessee World Affairs Council mourns the passing of Dr. Debbie Barnard on October 12, 2026. A founding member of the Council's Advisory Board and a dedicated supporter of global education, Debbie played an important role in connecting students with opportunities to explore international affairs. As a professor of French at Tennessee Tech University, she helped establish and organize the Council's International Affairs Careers Panels, continuing her involvement even after the Council relocated to Nashville.

Debbie joined Tennessee Tech in 2006 and held a Ph.D. in French language and literature from Vanderbilt University. A Fulbright Scholar in France and Tunisia, she was a respected researcher specializing in francophone literature and North African culture. Throughout her career, Debbie inspired students to embrace lifelong learning, think critically, and broaden their understanding of the world.

TNWAC remembers her with gratitude for her dedication to education, her students, and the Council's mission. A celebration of life in memory of Dr. Debbie Barnard was held on November 14, 2026.

Guest Columnist

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Three Kilometers That Run the World: Risks in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore

Since late February 2026, the global economy has contended with heightened oil prices and broader macroeconomic fallouts from conflict between the United States and Iran. Diversions in the Strait of Hormuz highlight the risks to the global economy posed by shipping chokepoints. This seems like a fitting time to discuss the Straits of Malacca and Singapore (referenced as "the Straits"), which, per CSIS, "dwarf[s] the Strait of Hormuz in maritime traffic."

I have identified three political risk types in the Straits: cooperation problems, nonstate actors, and interstate conflicts. Below is a brief breakdown of each.

Cooperation
Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia collectively have legal claim to the entirety of the Straits yet are bound by international law to maintain free trade through the Straits. Commerce through the Straits also strongly boosts the economies of Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. This removes substantial risk that any of these three coastal states will close the Straits, so I believe another Iran-style blockage is unlikely. Amid generally stable relations, in April 2026 Indonesian Finance Minister Sadewa caused some geopolitical concern by musing (then retracting) that the coastal states could monetize the Straits, showing us that one of the biggest threats to cooperation between the coastal states is a unilateral attempt to change multinational policy agreements.

Nonstate Actors
The only present-day anti-piracy agreement for the Straits of Malacca and Singapore is 2006's excitingly-titled Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP), backed by Japan. However, neither Malaysia nor Indonesia has formally signed onto this agreement, showing skepticism and, in my view, indicating fears that the U.S. may try to militarily leverage the Straits. The states do, however, participate in informal collaborations (like information sharing) with the organization. Regardless, nonstate risks remain pressing: piracy and armed robbery incidents reached a 19-year high in 2025. Contrary to some alarmist voices, sources show the vast majority of crimes in the Straits are not visibly linked with terrorist organizations, often stemming instead from worsening living conditions in some coastal areas of Indonesia and Malaysia.

Interstate Conflict
War in the South China Sea, or in its broader region, would thrust the Strait of Malacca to the forefront of global prominence as a chokepoint for China, the U.S., and the allies of both. I would assess that hot military confrontation at the Straits is unlikely for any belligerent: forcibly controlling or striking anywhere in the area would necessarily involve violating the territorial sovereignty of one or more coastal states. In a conflict with China, the U.S. could weaponize the straits with a blockade, which would damage the economies of the coastal states and potentially jeopardize bilateral relations.

This article is adapted from the author's policy analysis and recommendations.



Leo Bignault

Leo is a junior and co-president of Alexander Hamilton Society at Vanderbilt University

GLOBAL SNAPSHOT

ELECTIONS SHAPING U.S. FOREIGN RELATIONS IN 2026

Now that the U.S. midterm elections are behind us, we turn our attention to the wider world. From Europe to Asia and Latin America, elections in 2026 are reshaping alliances, trade relationships and security cooperation. We've selected six elections with implications for the United States, illustrating how political developments beyond its borders can influence American interests.



JAPAN

Parliamentary election
February 8

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's Liberal Democratic Party won a landslide victory in a snap general election.

The result strengthens her government's position as Japan, a key U.S. ally, navigates regional security challenges and relations with China.



GERMANY

State elections
March–September

Five German states held regional parliamentary elections, with gains for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) in several states.

The results highlight changing political dynamics in Europe's largest economy and a key U.S. partner in NATO and transatlantic trade.



HUNGARY

Parliamentary election
April 12

The pro-European Tisza party ended Viktor Orbán's 16 years in power with a decisive parliamentary victory.

The change could reshape Hungary's relations with Washington, the European Union and Russia, particularly regarding Ukraine.



COLOMBIA

Presidential election
June 21

Conservative Abelardo de la Espriella narrowly won the presidency, marking a shift from left-wing leadership.

His commitment to closer U.S. relations could reshape cooperation on drug trafficking, regional security and migration.



BRAZIL

Presidential elections
October 25

President Lula da Silva secured a fourth term, defeating Flávio Bolsonaro with 51.8% of the vote.

The result maintains a government that has challenged U.S. trade policies and pursued closer economic ties with China.



ISRAEL

Parliamentary election
October 27

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party won the most seats, but neither major political bloc secured a parliamentary majority.

Coalition negotiations could influence Israel's security policies, regional diplomacy and relations with the United States.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR EVENTS





With Friends Like These....The Way Forward for Transatlantic Trade and Security

with **Dr. Daniel Hamilton** and **Stephanie Harwood**

The Kurds: U.S. Relations, Regional Change, and the Kurdish-American Experience

with **Tabeer Taabur, Michael Trotter, Karl Dean**



> ***"The history of the Kurds reminds us that communities, not borders, define a people. Events like this bring together students, policymakers and professionals, some new to the topic and others deeply familiar with it, to share perspectives and engage in meaningful conversations."***
>
> *Erik Ringberg is a student of Anthropology at the University of Copenhagen and visiting Nashville for his studies.*



The Best and the Worst: 250 Years of U.S. Foreign Policy

with **Dr. James Lindsay**





Curious which decisions made the lists?

Explore the 10 best and 10 worst U.S. foreign policy decisions here: *https://www.cfr.org/articles/best-and-worst-foreign-policy-decisions-us-history*



GLOBAL AFFAIRS KNOWLEDGE QUIZ

1 In which Asian city will the upcoming Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit Occur?

- **A** Singapore
- **B** Shenzhen, China
- **C** Manila, Philippines
- **D** Busan, South Korea

2 In which US city will December's G20 summit occur?

- **A** San Francisco, California
- **B** Washington, DC
- **C** Chicago, Illinois
- **D** Miami, Florida

3 Which European leader recently broke the ice by initiating a direct call to Vladimir Putin to discuss Ukraine peace formulas?

- **A** Finnish President Alexander Stubb
- **B** French President Emmanuel Macron
- **C** Hungarian Prime Minister Peter Magyar
- **D** British Prime Minister Andy Burnham

Find the answers to the quiz on the last page of the newsletter

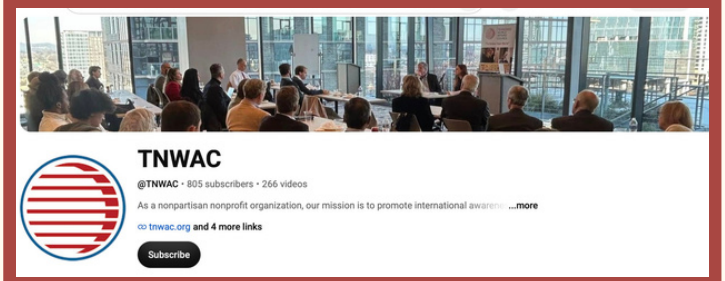
4 Which recent election loser was forced to flee his country after a controversial judge attempted to seize his passport?

- **A** Aleksandar Vucic of Serbia
- **B** Flavio Bolsonaro of Brazil
- **C** Viktor Orban of Hungary
- **D** Gadi Eisenkot of Israel

5 Which Middle Eastern nation has been heavily involved in mediating between the United States and Iran?

- **A** Qatar
- **B** Turkey
- **C** Pakistan
- **D** All of the Above

TNWAC also on Youtube



Check out our latest webinars and other activities on our Youtube channel: https://www.youtube.com/@TNWAC

A Note from the Editor



This month's guest column got me thinking about my experiences working across cultures. For many years, I was part of an organization bringing together people from the Nordic countries, Poland, and Estonia. From this side of the Atlantic, these countries might seem culturally quite similar. Yet, even among such close neighbors, we often found differences in how we thought, communicated, and worked.

What stayed with me from those years, however, was not the differences but the similarities. Wherever we come from, we are guided by many of the same human needs, hopes, concerns, and motivations. And often, once we get past our assumptions and take the time to really listen, we discover just how much we have in common.

Perhaps that is something worth remembering when we look at the world today. In a time when differences between countries, cultures, and communities so often dominate the headlines, it is easy to lose sight of what connects us.

Kristiina Oja is a volunteer at TNWAC.

Did You Know?

Thanksgiving Dinner Has Global Roots

Thanksgiving is a distinctly American tradition, but the foods on our holiday tables tell a much more international story.

Potatoes originated in the Andes, green beans in the Americas, and pumpkin pie spices like cinnamon and nutmeg in Asia. Turkey, native to North America, also made its way to European tables.

So, this Thanksgiving, remember that even America's most cherished traditions reflect centuries of global trade and cultural exchange.

SAVE THE DATE



DISTINGUISHED SPEAKER SERIES

Shared Continent, Shifting Rules: What Comes Next for Canada and the United States

With Louise Blais, Former Canadian Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN

Support TNWAC

As a nonpartisan nonprofit organization, our mission is to **promote international awareness, understanding**, and **connections** to enhance the region's global stature and to prepare Tennesseans to thrive in our increasingly complex and interconnected world.

- **Bring a friend** to one of our events and encourage them to join us as a member!
- **Introduce our team to an expert** in your network to join us as a speaker in 2027!
- **Encourage businesses** you love to join TNWAC as a corporate member or sponsor!

Answers for the knowledge Quiz

- 5/5 – Your global knowledge is amazing. You're truly on top of world affairs! 🌎
- 4/5 – Impressive! You have strong global awareness.
- 3/5 – Not bad! You're well-informed, with room to grow.
- 2/5 – A good start! Keep exploring global issues.
- 1/5 – You're just getting started — stay curious!
- 0/5 – TNWAC bring knowledge and understanding through in-person events, webinars, and the Newsletter

1) B 2) D 3) A 4) B 5) D

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