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>> America's Role in the World

What Does National Security Mean in the 21st Century?

THE WORLD BEARS little resemblance to the way it was in 1991, when the Soviet Union fell and the Cold War ended. Since even as recently as 2001, when three hijacked airplanes brought the first foreign terrorist attack to US soil, the world has changed significantly. Since then, the United States has initiated two wars—in Afghanistan and in Iraq. Major policy changes by the United States have left much of the world community unsure of our intentions. Finally, the greatest economic contraction since before World War II began in late 2007 and its aftereffects still grip almost every nation on earth.

Where the world was once dominated by two “super-powers”—the Soviet Union and the United States—the

end of the Cold War created what many observers called a “unipolar” world in which the United States was the clear leader, able to bend most events to its will. But that moment has passed. As political scientist Samuel P. Huntington observed, “The global structure of power in the Cold War was basically bipolar; the emerging structure is very different. . . . There is now only one superpower. But that does not mean that the world is unipolar.”

The US Director of National Intelligence issued a report in late 2012 that assessed where things stood and where they are likely to go over the next two decades. One conclusion of this comprehensive study is that the United States “will remain the ‘first among equals’ alongside the



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In December 2001, China officially became the World Trade Organization's 143rd member.

other great powers . . . [But] the era of unrivalled American ascendancy . . . is fast winding down.”

Evidence of challenges to US dominance are everywhere. Over the last decade, China has gone from being just a very large nation to becoming the world's second largest economy (and is expected to surpass the United States within 15-20 years). The largest trade deficit that we have with any single nation is the one we have with China. India's economy has grown rapidly, as has its influence in the world. India and neighboring Pakistan are now strategically vital. Because each is armed with nuclear weapons, instability in that region is more of a threat than ever before. And Pakistan, next door to Afghanistan, remains a breeding ground for terrorism even after the death of Osama bin Laden.

Russia had been a trusted friend but is now, at best, a cool ally. While weaker than it was during the Cold War, Russia has shown it is still willing to flex its economic and military muscles and is capable of thwarting the intentions of the United States. Even as Russia continues to provide transit routes for the support of US and multinational forces in Afghanistan, President Vladimir Putin has recently cracked down on dissent and declared that the West is meddling in Russian internal affairs.

Problems are becoming more global in nature, too. Climate change (global warming), pandemics, and resource depletion threaten countries without regard to superpower status or military strength. Many of these threats require response, but no one nation can effectively deal with them alone.

The years since 2000 have seen a cooling of international good will toward the United States, even as billions of American dollars flow overseas and thousands of American citizens do humanitarian work abroad for nonprofit groups, medical missions, and the like. While international opinion of the United States improved somewhat after our withdrawal from Iraq, a 2012 global poll conducted by the BBC World Service still found that slightly less than half of those surveyed considered the United States' influence “mainly positive.” Overall, the United States ranked eighth in the poll, behind Japan, Germany, Canada, the United

Kingdom, China, France, and the European Union, as a positive influence in the world. These sentiments represent a sharp drop in approval from a time when global opinion of the United States was predominantly positive.

The United States cannot base its foreign policy and actions on whether others view us favorably. Nevertheless, such opinions should perhaps give us pause, as they can complicate and hinder pursuit of our goals.

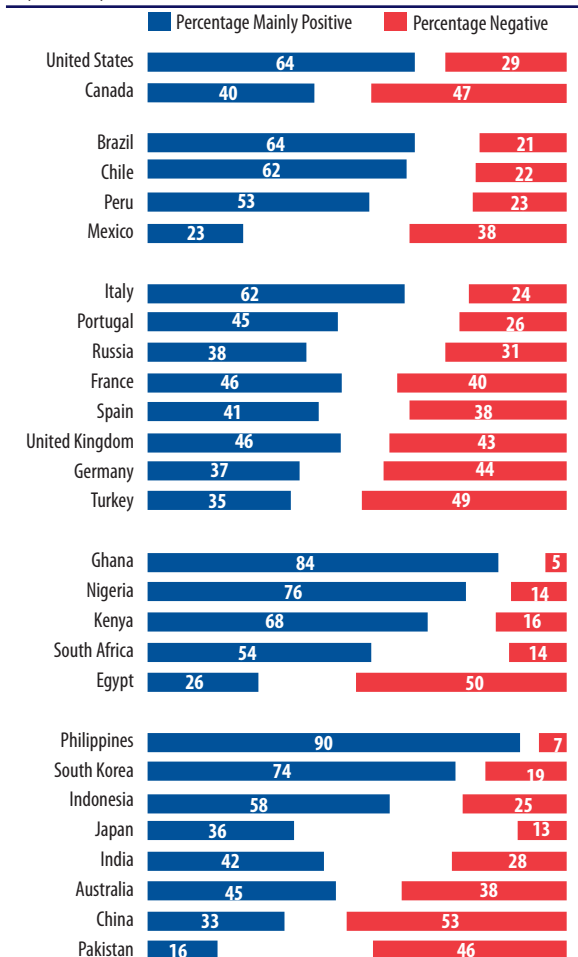
It is time for us to take stock of America's role in the world. How shall we approach the world in an environment in which our power is diminished but in which we face increased volatility, more competition, and a variety of global threats?

In other words: What does national security mean in the 21st century?

This issue guide provides three options for responding to that question. Each reflects a fundamentally different concern, and each suggests actions that we might take to address it, along with possible downsides or likely trade-offs. By working through each option, we can come to our own individual and collective decisions about what course of action we would support and under what conditions.

Views of US influence

By country, 2011



Source: WorldPublicOpinion.org

As the war in Afghanistan winds down, we continue to face the threat of terrorism, as well as threats from Iran, North Korea, and Pakistan. At the same time, traditional adversaries like Russia and China are gaining power. Our most important goal must be to safeguard the people of the United States.



>>National Security Means Safeguarding the United States

IN MANY WAYS, the world is becoming an increasingly dangerous place. This first option contends that the security of the people of the United States must remain the chief priority when it comes to the nation's role in the world. If we are insecure, then all other issues must take a back seat.

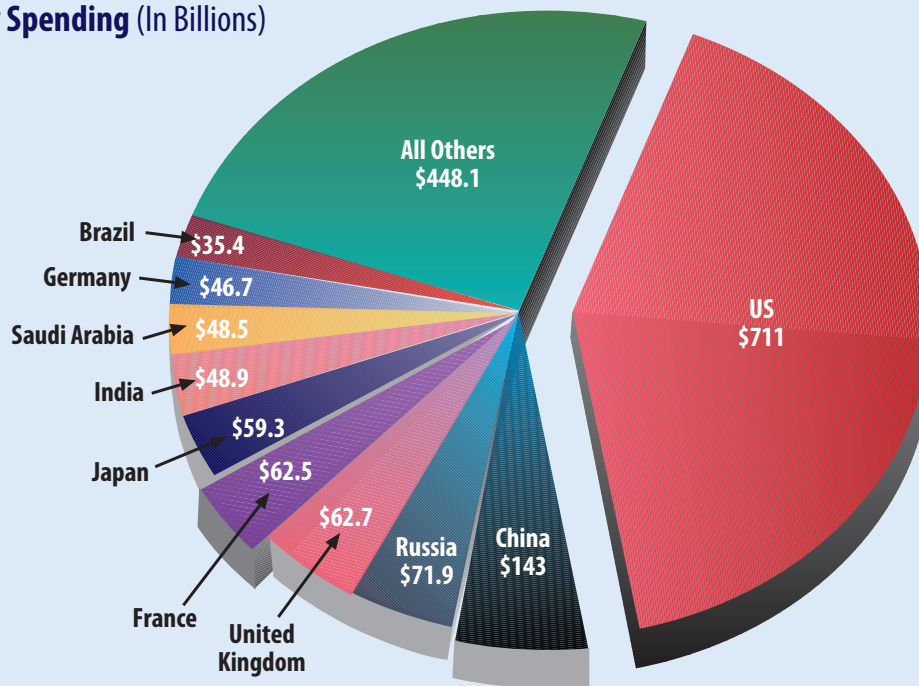
The United States faces a number of threats. Some of them are relatively new: 9/11, for example, brought us an awareness of, and a determination to defeat, organized terrorism.

While there have been no foreign terrorist attacks on US soil since that day, the global threat remains high. According to the government's National Counterterrorism Center, approximately 12,500 people were killed in terrorist attacks worldwide in 2011. This is a drop of 12 percent

from 2010, primarily due to fewer attacks in Russia and in East Asia, but deaths from terrorism rose in Colombia and Nigeria.

Other adversaries are returning after brief absences. The Cold War ended with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, but Russia is increasingly a source of concern. Russia cannot be ignored, in part because it has one of the largest nuclear stockpiles in the world, and also because that government has become unpredictable and, on occasion, hostile. In 2009, Russia threatened to place short-range nuclear weapons on its border with NATO countries unless the United States abandoned plans to put missile defense elements (interceptor missiles and radar) in Poland and the Czech Republic. (The United States scrapped its original plan and another, smaller project is planned for 2018.)

2011 World Military Spending (In Billions)



Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

In 2009, Russia surprised the world by stationing two nuclear-powered submarines off the eastern coast of the United States. According to Norman Polmar, a naval historian quoted in the *New York Times*, “I don’t think they’ve put two first-line nuclear subs off the US coast in about 15 years.”

Just as troubling, the Russian Duma adopted a law in fall 2012 severely curtailing the operation of US non-profit organizations and threatening stiff jail sentences for Russians who worked with them.

Many observers also look to China as a significant potential threat. “In recent years, as the US and much of the rest of the world focused on wars, fears of terrorism, and various emotional social issues,” writes Charles W. McMillion in a report to the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, “China transformed itself into an economic powerhouse.”

More ominously, in the last two decades, China’s defense budget has grown by double digits. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen has noted that China is “developing capabilities that are very maritime focused, maritime and air focused, and in many ways, very much focused on us.”

Eric C. Anderson and Jeffrey G. Engstrom of the respected research firm Science Applications International Corporation report on the problem:

Equipped with satellite-based surveillance assets, top-of-the-line Russian fighter aircraft, a rapidly modernizing navy, and more than 1,300 short-

and medium-range ballistic missiles, the [People’s Liberation Army] can locate, track, and engage any military force operating within 500 miles of the Chinese coastline. [This circumstance] suggests the Chinese military is preparing to show up ready for a regional battle before the forces of a responding power such as the United States could be positioned effectively in the theater of operations.

Another important consideration for the United States is the erratic, secretive country of North Korea. Since 2002, when it restarted its nuclear development program, North Korea is estimated to have developed between two and nine nuclear weapons, though it is unknown whether they are operable. The country has made clear that it will continue a nuclear enrichment program, and its already-chilly relations with South Korea have deteriorated further in recent years. North Korea attacked a South Korean island in November 2010 and killed four people. The sudden death in December 2011, of North Korea’s leader, Kim Jong-il, and the choice of his youngest son, Kim Jong-un, as successor has further complicated our relations with that country.

Iran is another volatile nation that could pose a threat. Iran continues to refine uranium that could be used in nuclear weapons but says it is for peaceful purposes. The International Atomic Energy Agency issued a rebuke in November 2011 for what it described as Iran’s efforts to develop a nuclear weapon, and someone, possibly Israel

or the United States, introduced a powerful computer virus into Iran's nuclear research facilities in 2010. Iran has rejected all international efforts to control its nuclear research and has continued to enrich uranium in the face of increasingly severe economic sanctions by the international community. This issue remains unresolved and troubling.

What We Could Do

Our global objective must always be to maintain the safety of the United States and its citizens. This option holds that, above all, we must guard against threats to national security. Here are some things this option suggests we could do, along with some of the drawbacks:

- Give national security the highest priority. This is the most basic function of any government. We also need to build up the US military in order to safeguard against threats from China and Russia, and we should revive plans to deploy missile defense systems in NATO countries.

But ... building up our forces and missile defense capabilities to counter possible threats from China or Russia could lead to a new, wasteful arms race that leaves the overall balance of power unchanged. We have made great strides in our relations with Russia, for instance in cooperating on Afghanistan. A buildup might undermine that cooperation.

- Make sure that Afghanistan is stabilized so it is not a safe haven for terrorists and do everything within our power to eliminate terror networks in other regions. Terrorism and unstable nations are the greatest threats to US security. We should continue and expand the use of drone aircraft to monitor and attack terrorist cells and make clear to other nations we will not tolerate the rise of new terrorist threats.

But ... aggressive responses to terrorism may lead the United States into situations that are untenable or that may destabilize other nations. For instance, combating terrorists in Afghanistan could force them across the border into Pakistan and exacerbate that nation's problems. And drone attacks may only launch a whole new arms race, as other nations develop the technology.

- Respond assertively to nuclear threats from Iran and North Korea. The United States and its allies are key targets for these emerging nuclear countries. We should deal with these threats forcefully.

But ... dealing strongly with Iran or North Korea may cause them to take risky actions. It may also push the United States to take undue risks. Dealing unilaterally with these nations instead of coordinating with others may leave the United States isolated.

These suggestions are also shown in the Summary on p. 11.



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South Korean armed soldiers guard the chain-link fence against invasions from North Korean soldiers. The fence runs several miles along the demilitarized zone separating North Korea from South Korea.

OPTION TWO

The United States cannot long remain a superpower if it is the world's largest debtor nation and runs huge budget deficits. We need to focus on increasing employment, eliminating our staggering public indebtedness and improving the balance of trade. Whatever steps we take domestically to improve the economy, it will mean spending less on the military and reducing the amount of money that flows overseas.



>>National Security Depends on Putting Our Economic House in Order

MOST NATIONS are currently facing economic turmoil. The US economy, after shrinking by 3.9 percent from 2008 to 2009 in the depths of the recession, has only weakly rebounded. Yet we are not alone. The recession, which began in the United States in December 2007 soon spread to the European Union (EU) and has since affected nations around the world. Among the seven countries with the largest economies, only China was able to escape recession, but even its economy has slowed significantly, making economic recovery in the EU and in the United States even more challenging.

America's standing in the world has been diminished as a result of trade imbalances and an accumulated public debt that appears insupportable. National strength, includ-

ing military power, derives from economic vitality. This second option holds that, in order to remain a strong leader on the global stage, the United States must first make sure its economy remains vital and growing.

A very high priority must be given to creating more jobs. The unemployment rate, which was 4.9 percent as the recession began, stood at 7.9 percent in late 2012. That doesn't reflect the estimated 10 million more workers who are underemployed, or many others who have given up looking. The housing market is only slowly recovering.

Since 1997, the US trade deficit—we import more than we export—has been growing. It shrank somewhat during the recession but reached \$558 billion in 2011, according to the Census Bureau. In other words, we

consume \$558 billion more than we produce. We need to increase trade with other nations; pursuing more commerce with China and Russia (especially given Russia's large energy reserves) could bind us closer as allies.

But, the trade deficit is not the only global problem for the United States. Most years, the US government budget has a deficit: it is obligated to pay out more than it receives. In order to make its payments, the government borrows money. The national debt reached \$16 trillion in fall 2012. That's a debt of \$50,983 per American.

While there are many components to the national debt, there are a few large expenditures that relate to the United States' standing in the world:

- The United States spent \$711 billion on defense in 2012—more than the next 13 countries combined. Second on the list is China, with an estimated \$143 billion. (Russia's spending, while still relatively small, has moved it from seventh to third place on the list in the past decade.) Our military has a presence in 761 foreign locations and 104 US territories. This is “not only a staggeringly large number compared even with the great empires of the past,” writes University of California, San Diego professor Chalmers Johnson, “but one the US clearly cannot afford given its severely weakened economic condition.”
- Meanwhile, foreign assistance—money we spend to help other nations—has continued to increase. In 2010, the United States spent \$39.4 billion on foreign assistance, up from \$14.5 billion in 2000.

What We Could Do

With such significant economic issues facing us, many say we need to focus on eliminating our staggering public indebtedness. That means spending less on the military and reducing the amount of money that flows overseas.

Here are some things that this option suggests we could do, along with some of the drawbacks:

- Cut back on military spending and reduce the US military presence around the world. With so many bases around the globe, and so much spending, this could go a long way to helping us recover economic power. More reliance on diplomacy than on the threat of force might allow us to reduce military spending.

But ... if we cut back on military spending and reduced our military presence, other nations like China and Russia may build up their strength. The United States would face diminished influence in the world. And reducing military spending would hurt many communities which rely on it for their economic prosperity.

- Reduce military and nonmilitary assistance to other countries. The United States can't afford to rescue the world right now. Yet we have military bases in stable, peaceful allied countries and send increasing amounts of aid to other countries.

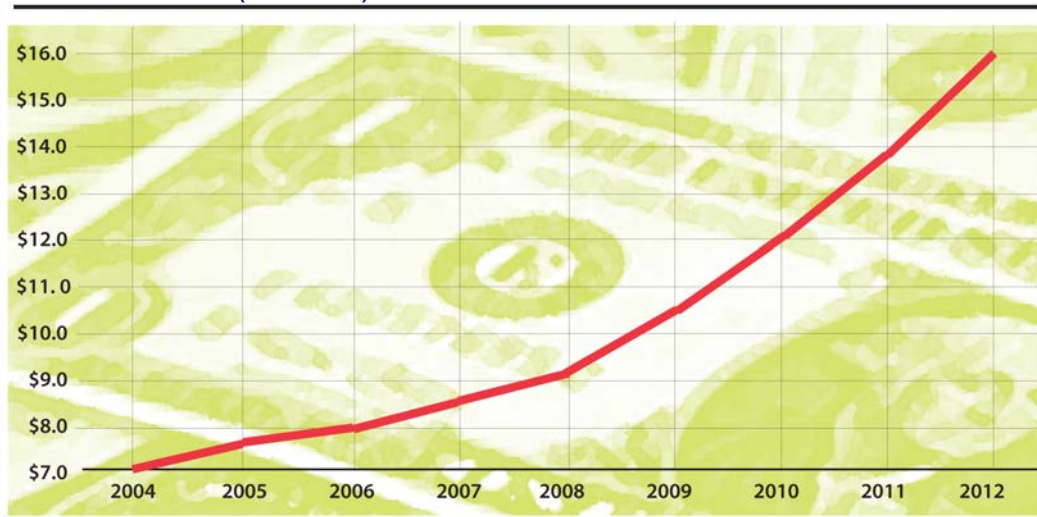
But ... we would remove a stabilizing presence in many parts of the world if we took away our troops, and we would lose some of our ability to respond quickly in crises if we kept them all at home. And if we reduced foreign aid, many friends who now depend on it would face economic difficulty.

- Promote globalization and improve the balance of trade. The United States should recognize and adapt to the fact that globalization is a reality and should negotiate free-trade agreements with other nations, which historically has led to economic growth. Increase investment in domestic and alternative energy sources, including nuclear, in order to reduce reliance on foreign countries and improve the balance of trade.

But ... unrestrained globalization gives too much power to multinational banks and corporations who don't always share our interests. Also, free-trade agreements without worker and environmental protections may cost US jobs and damage the environment.

These and additional suggestions are shown in the Summary on p. 12.

US National Debt (In Trillions)



Source: US Treasury

groups will obtain nuclear weapons. Inadequate controls on nuclear stockpiles are a particular concern in Russia and Pakistan.

“Unfortunately the threats are global and the solutions are global,” says Ambassador Nancy Soderberg, a former Clinton administration national security advisor. “We cannot keep weapons of mass destruction out of the hands of terrorists on our own. And nor can we keep our economy strong on our own. We need to engage the global community and that means leading it.”

Public health experts also point to pandemics as a significant threat. A pandemic is an infectious disease that spreads across a large region or across the world. The recent H1N1 outbreaks are an example. Pandemics can cause illness and death on a large scale. Doctors fear another pandemic may arise as influenza viruses mutate and as antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria develop. A handful of travelers entering the air traffic system can create an outbreak that cannot be stopped easily. In today’s highly mobile world, pandemics are very hard to contain without swift, coordinated international responses.

Almost all nations agree that climate change—global warming—is an urgent problem with potentially catastrophic effects. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the earth’s average surface temperature will likely rise anywhere between 2 and 11.5 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the century. Most scientists say this is caused mainly by “greenhouse gases” from the burning of fossil fuels like petroleum. This warming trend may cause changes in storm patterns, rising ocean levels, increased drought in already arid areas of the planet, and increased acidity of the world’s oceans, endangering the entire oceanic food chain.

Combating climate change will require every nation—developed and developing—to cut emissions and rein in

energy use. The only way to make this happen would be to negotiate multilateral agreements. So far, treaties to reduce greenhouse emissions have not been successful, in part due to lack of support from the United States. But this option suggests that the United States ought to take a leadership role on this issue.

What We Could Do

Today’s challenges face everyone on the planet, not just one nation. This option holds that we need to rethink what “national security” means when the greatest threats against the United States also imperil other countries. Here are some things that this option suggests we could do, along with some of the drawbacks:

- Work with other nations to address long-term threats to humanity. The greatest dangers cannot be met by military power, or by the United States working alone. The United States can, however, take a stronger leadership role to combat global warming. We can also work with other nations to develop partnerships to address problems like pandemics, overpopulation and food shortages, and depleted natural resources.

But ... working collaboratively with other nations would make it more difficult for us to act unilaterally. Treaties and agreements with other nations may penalize the United States more than others and put us at a disadvantage. Taking effective action against global dangers may also take more resources than we can spare.

- Join with other nations to more aggressively monitor and combat emerging infectious diseases. The United States should forge tighter bonds among national health agencies and border authorities from every country to



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Many scientists warn that global warming will have potentially catastrophic effects. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the earth’s average surface temperature will likely rise anywhere between 2 and 11.5 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the century.



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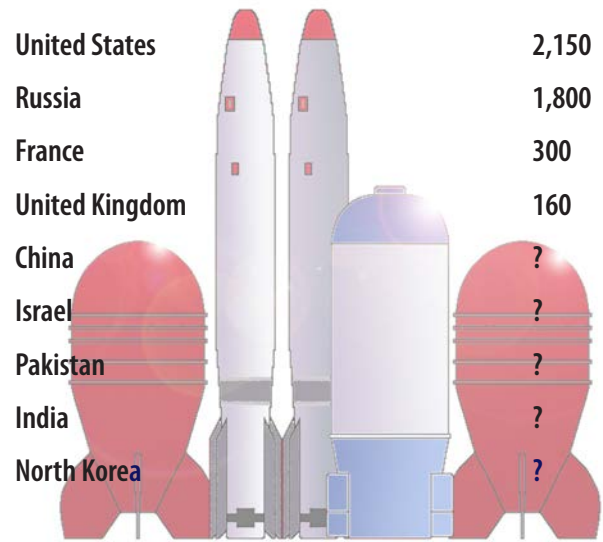
But ... in addition to giving up some of our ability to act alone, this would mean that American citizens could be detained by any other nation on suspicion of illness.

- Work with other nations to address the threat of nuclear war and other international security threats. This would include dramatically reducing the number of nuclear weapons worldwide and engaging with existing multilateral organizations.

But ... cutting our nuclear arsenal may endanger our security or diminish our ability to address military threats. And, decommissioning large numbers of nuclear weapons may make them more available to unstable nations or other enemies.

These and additional suggestions are shown in the Summary on p. 12.

Operational Nuclear Weapons



Source: Federation of American Scientists

The National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI)

This issue guide was prepared for the National Issues Forums Institute in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation. Issue guides in this series are used by civic and educational organizations interested in addressing public issues. These organizations use the books in locally initiated forums convened each year in hundreds of communities. For a description of the National Issues Forums, log onto the website: www.nifi.org.

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Problems are becoming more global in nature, too. Climate change (global warming), pandemics, and resource depletion threaten countries without regard to superpower status or military strength. Many of these threats require response, but no one nation can effectively deal with them alone.

OPTION ONE

National Security Means Safeguarding the United States

Our global objective must always be to maintain the safety of the United States and its citizens. Above all, we must guard against threats to national security. Even with the war in Iraq over and troop pullouts ongoing in Afghanistan, we continue to face the threat of terrorism.

But...

An emphasis on military strength and security can lead to arrogance and heavy-handed behavior, which may turn parts of the world against us. Favoring weapons over diplomacy may well discourage potential allies.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE	TRADE-OFFS TO CONSIDER
Because national security is the most basic function of any government, it should receive the highest priority.	Building up the military and taking an aggressive posture internationally makes it more likely we would respond to a situation with force and potentially trigger a war.
Build up our military and missile defense capabilities to safeguard against threats from Russia and China.	Russia or China may feel threatened and respond by ramping up their military forces.
Do everything possible to eliminate terror networks around the world, including the use of drone aircraft to monitor and attack terrorist cells.	Combating terrorism may lead the United States into untenable situations, as in Afghanistan, and increasing drone attacks might launch a whole new arms race.
Ensure that Afghanistan is stabilized so that it is not a safe haven for terrorists.	Our only objective in Afghanistan should be defeating al-Qaeda, rather than trying to make that country a secure democracy.
Assertively deal with the nuclear threats posed by Iran and North Korea.	Acting assertively toward Iran or North Korea may lead them or the United States to take risky actions that could seriously endanger us.

OPTION TWO

National Security Depends on Putting Our Economic House in Order

The United States cannot long remain a super-power if it is the world’s largest debtor nation and runs huge budget deficits. We need to focus on eliminating our staggering public indebtedness and improving the balance of trade. That means spending less on the military and reducing the amount of money that flows overseas.

But...

Cutting back on military spending and foreign aid will reduce our leverage around the world and diminish our standing. Giving up that kind of power could actually hurt us economically if other nations feel they can take advantage of us.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE	TRADE-OFFS TO CONSIDER
Cut back on military spending and reduce US military presence around the world.	Russia and China could outstrip us militarily or in global influence. Cutting back on the military will harm many US communities that depend on defense spending.
Reduce military and nonmilitary assistance to other countries.	Cutting foreign aid in places like Pakistan or Egypt will only make them turn to nations like Iran, China, or Russia that may work against the United States.
Promote free-trade agreements with other nations as a way of adapting to globalization.	Free trade without worker and environmental protections could cost US jobs and damage the environment. And unrestrained globalization gives more power to multinational banks and corporations.
Coordinate US economic policy with other nations to ensure that the world does not slide into another Great Depression.	The United States could lose its economic autonomy if we coordinate our policies with those of other nations.
Increase trade with Russia and China as a way of strengthening ties and boosting our economy.	Increasing trade could mean the United States would be helping to finance its own competitors.

OPTION THREE

National Security Means Recognizing That Global Threats Are Our Greatest Challenge

The greatest threats facing the United States—the risk of nuclear war, environmental devastation and climate change (global warming), pandemics, overpopulation and food shortages, and the depletion of natural resources—also endanger other countries. We must take a leadership role in collaborating with other nations to address long-term threats to humanity.

But...

Greater collaboration with other nations means the United States would have to give up some control over its own affairs.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE	TRADE-OFFS TO CONSIDER
Take a leadership role to combat climate change and other environmental threats by actively engaging with other nations while seriously investing in “green” technology.	International agreements to address environmental threats may penalize and cost the United States more than other nations.
Work more closely with Russia and China, to address security concerns in Iran and North Korea.	Russia’s and China’s price to cooperate might be very high as their interests may not be the same as ours.
Cooperate more closely with other nations to monitor travelers and deter emerging infectious diseases.	This would mean that American citizens could be detained by any other nation on suspicion of illness.
Work with other nations to dramatically reduce and secure nuclear weapons globally.	Slashing the US nuclear weapons arsenal may diminish our ability to address security threats.
Work multilaterally with other nations on security issues, much as the United States did in Desert Storm.	We would inevitably give up some influence and prestige around the world if we work with partner nations who likely would use the opportunity to raise their own global profile.