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Keeping America Safe

**What Is Our Greatest Threat?
How Should We Respond?**



One Way to Hold a Deliberative Forum

1.

**Review ground rules.
Introduce the issue to be deliberated.**

2.

Ask people to describe how the issue has affected them or their families.

3.

**Consider each option one at a time.
Allow equal time for each.
What is attractive?
What about the drawbacks?**

4.

**Review the conversation as a group. What areas of common ground were apparent?
Just as important: What tensions and trade-offs were most difficult?**

Ground Rules for a Forum

- **Focus on the options.**
- **All options should be considered fairly.**
- **No one or two individuals should dominate.**
- **Maintain an open and respectful atmosphere.**
- **Help the moderator keep the conversation on track.**
- **Everyone is encouraged to participate.**
- **Listen to each other.**

About This Issue Guide

America today faces a diverse and daunting set of threats from overseas. The global challenges currently facing the US are complicated and changing rapidly. Other countries are flexing their muscles as never before. Terror attacks are a risk every American considers, whether at home or abroad. Trade wars are heating up. Climate change, nuclear weapons, and emerging viruses remind us that the problems of the world are interconnected.

These problems, as varied as they are, present difficult choices for how the United States plans and conducts its foreign policy:

- Should we invest in maintaining our role as the world's dominant power to ensure our safety in a dangerous world? Or should we focus more on investing in and rebuilding our own country and stop trying to police the world?
- Should we form alliances with other countries that make the world safer even if we do not get everything we want? Or should we cut back on international agreements because these could limit our options and let other countries take advantage of us?
- Should we put more emphasis on strengthening our military so we can defend ourselves against powers like Russia and China? Or should we put more emphasis on diplomacy, building alliances, and promoting democracy and human rights because, in the long run, this is what makes the world safer?
- Should the US be a robust and active champion of human rights and democracy around the world? Or should we step back and take a more measured role, realizing that other countries will not adopt our way of life unless and until they are ready to do so?

The concerns that underlie this issue are not confined to party affiliation, nor are they captured by labels like “conservative” or “liberal.”

The research involved in developing this guide included interviews and conversations with Americans from all walks of life, as well as a study of nonpartisan public-opinion research, subject-matter scans, and reviews of initial drafts by people with direct experience in this area.



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Keeping America Safe

What Is Our Greatest Threat? How Should We Respond?



TODAY'S HEADLINES can be daunting: A lone terrorist attacks civilians, including American tourists, in cities around the globe; Russia flexes its military muscles and interferes in elections; and North Korea has assembled an arsenal of missiles capable of striking the continental United States.

Americans have rarely faced such a variety of threats. China has become an economic powerhouse, its competition threatening American prosperity, its foreign aid and influence rivaling our own. Climate change and infectious diseases that can spread from an isolated village to any major city remind us that the natural world also poses dangers that affect every country on earth. A major conflict in the Middle East could have severe implications for the US and global economy.

No wonder Americans are divided over how to keep our country safe in today's dangerous and increasingly complex world.

Conflict Areas Worldwide



Source: Council on Foreign Relations, 2018

Asked, for example, whether overwhelming military force is the best way to defeat terrorism, 47 percent of Americans surveyed by the Pew Research Center said yes. But an equal number said such a strategy only incites hatred and resentments that lead to more terrorism. The survey revealed conflicting views not just on which measures would best contain threats, but which threats are the highest priority.

Since World War II, we have used our military might and economic clout to protect our homeland and promote American values such as democracy and free trade. The 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union seemed to vindicate our leadership, bringing the Cold War to an end and leaving the United States as the world's sole, unchallenged superpower.

But our role as the world's leader also has led us into interventions in other countries, incited hatred and resentments, and cost us trillions of dollars that we could have invested in our own country. If the unpopular Vietnam War raised doubts about our global involvements, the 21st century brought 9/11, drawn-out wars in Afghanistan and Iraq

that are yet to be fully resolved and, in 2008, the greatest global economic contraction since the Great Depression.

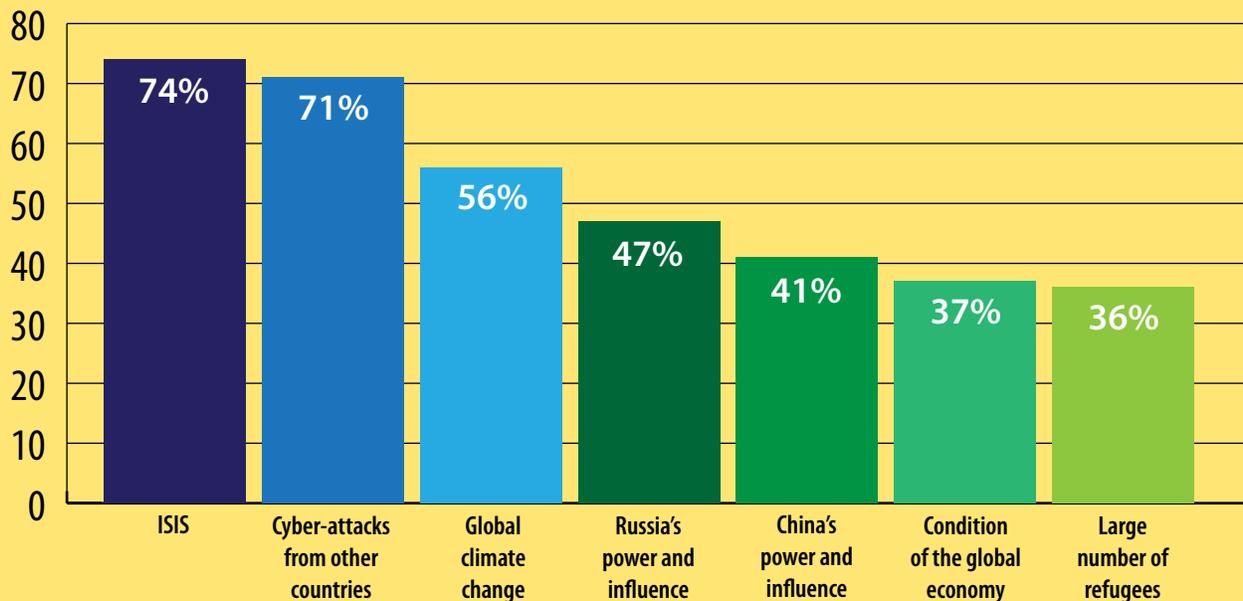
This issue guide asks *What is our greatest threat? How should we respond?*

Any option that we pursue will need to take into account our military strength, our economic standing and trade relationships, and our commitment to democracy worldwide.

Is our biggest threat losing our economic clout—giving up on the American dream that each generation will achieve a better standard of living than the one that came before? If so, we should stop acting as the world's police force and instead focus on improving our economy and protecting jobs from foreign competition. But shrinking our military and imposing trade tariffs and sanctions could concede influence to other nations and leave us more vulnerable to attack.

Is our biggest threat the growing power of Russia and China and the worldwide disorder sown by rogue states

Americans Identify Top Threats to the United States



Source: Pew Research Center, 2017

and other nonstate actors, like terrorists? If so, we should build up an overpowering military force to deter attacks. But doing so might spark a new arms race or invite a backlash while neglecting problems in our own country.

Is our biggest threat a collection of global dangers such as terrorism, cyber-espionage, new and rapidly spreading infectious diseases, climate change, and regional conflicts that could spread disorder? If so, we should put more effort into building alliances and promoting democracy and human rights. But continuing to bankroll global relationships and humanitarian missions might leave our own shores less well defended and our domestic needs unmet.

In the booming post-World War II years, the US could probably afford to lead in every area—militarily, economically, and politically as a champion of democracy and human rights. Can we still do that? As we look into the future, what are our biggest threats, and how should we invest our money, our people, and our reputation to ward them off?

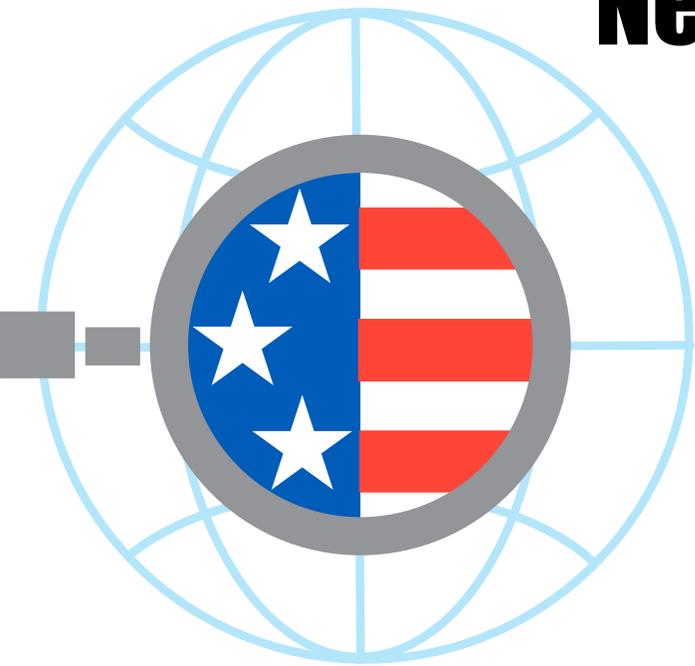
This issue guide offers a framework for deliberating over the priorities that should inform our nation's role on the world's stage. It presents three different options for

moving forward—each based on a different way of looking at our greatest threats and each involving a different set of prescriptions for what should be done. Most important, each option has significant downsides and drawbacks. Each of these will need to be considered if we are to decide how best to use our economic, military, and diplomatic resources.



Option 1:

Make America's Needs Our Top Priority



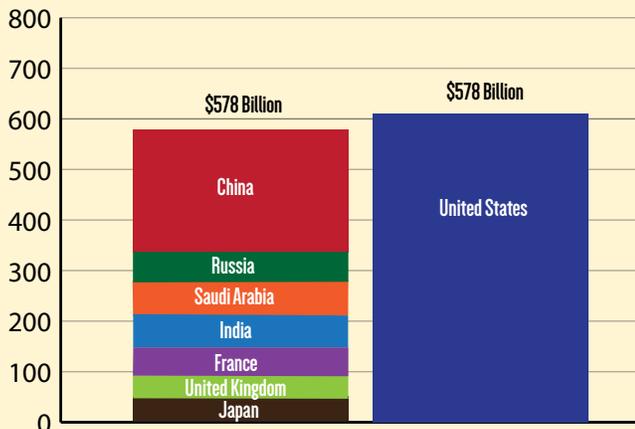
THIS OPTION SAYS the United States has focused too much on policing and protecting the world and not enough on shoring up its own prosperity and taking care of its own people. It is time to put our country's needs first. The United States spends billions on defense and foreign aid while, at home, bridges and highways are crumbling, students face mountains of debt, and people go bankrupt trying to pay their medical bills. Even though the United States has recovered from the Great Recession, a changing job landscape and too many poor and troubled communities are leaving too many Americans behind.

It is time, according to this option, to prioritize our own country's needs.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the five-star general who led the Allies to victory in Europe during World War II and then

The United States Spends More on Defense Than the Next Seven Countries Combined

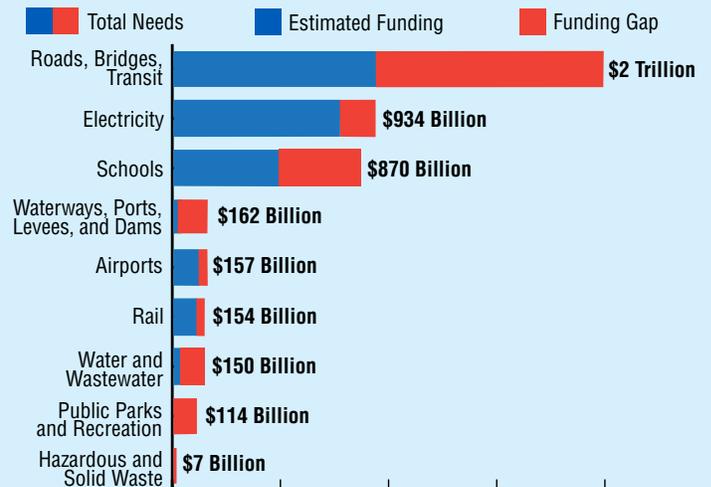
Defense spending (billions of dollars)



Source: Peter G. Peterson Foundation, 2018

Public Infrastructure Neglected

Infrastructure needs, funded and unfunded, 2016–2025



Source: Society of Civil Engineers, 2017

presided over America’s postwar boom, recognized the American economy as “one of the wonders of the world.”

“It undergirds our international position, our military security, and the standard of living of every citizen,” he said. “Economic preparedness is fully as important to the nation as military preparedness.”

What about our economic preparedness today? True, a decade after the 2008 financial crisis, Wall Street rebounded to record highs, and home prices in the hottest markets more than recovered. But the US faces record debt, growing deficits, and troubling gaps between rich and poor.

“The wealth gaps between upper-income families and lower- and middle-income families in 2016 were the highest levels recorded,” wrote economist Rakesh Kochhar in a report from the Pew Research Center. “Although the wealth of upper-income families more than recovered from the losses experienced during the Great Recession, the wealth of lower- and middle-income families in 2016 was comparable to 1989 levels.” The outsourcing of manufacturing jobs overseas and other fundamental work shifts make it hard for middle- and lower-income families to catch up.

For almost a century, Americans have come to expect that life will get better for their children. But that dream no longer holds true in many places. Stanford University researchers

found that only half the children born in the 1980s grew up to earn more in real terms than their parents did, down from 92 percent of children born in 1940.

“I was born in 1980 and was completely wiped out in the fallout from 2008,” wrote a reader commenting on a *New York Times* story on the Great Recession’s 10th anniversary. “My company closed, I was laid off, unemployed for a year, savings obliterated, and the jobs I was able to get in the years afterward were very thin in regards to wages. . . . Myself, and many others my age, certainly feel as though we’ve fallen through the cracks.”

According to this option, we should save and revive jobs by moving aggressively to protect American industries from foreign competition and American jobs from cheap foreign labor. It also says we should cut military spending and scale back our foreign involvement to focus on the biggest threat to American power and influence: an uneven economy that leaves too many of our own citizens behind.

A Primary Drawback of This Option: *We can turn our backs on the world’s chaos, but we can’t seal our borders from its impacts.*



What We Should Do

Sharply Cut Defense Spending and Use Money for Domestic Needs

This option says that we should cut defense spending and use the savings on education, health care, jobs, and other ways to shore up our middle class. It says we should stop being the world's defender, with all its costs and responsibilities, and focus instead on building the world's strongest economy.

During the Cold War, America had to play global police force, according to foreign policy fellow Charles V. Peña of Defense Priorities, a think tank focused on promoting stronger national defense strategies. Our allies were still rebuilding after World War II, and we were the only nation powerful enough to keep Soviet expansionism in check. But the fall of the Soviet Union brought an end to that world, and our allies can now do more for themselves. Today, old Cold War strategies no longer make sense.

This option says that we should withdraw troops from Germany and South Korea—wealthy and stable countries that can put up their own defense. It also holds that we should rethink our more recent involvements. Since 9/11, prolonged wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have cost more than \$5.6 trillion. They have cost the lives of nearly 7,000 US soldiers and left more than 52,000 wounded. More than 200,000 civilians have been killed by all parties in these conflicts, and 10 million more are living as war refugees and internally displaced persons.

Reducing overall defense spending, this option says, would not leave us unprotected.

Under this option, the 30-year effort already under way to modernize and maintain our nuclear arsenal—the world's largest—would continue, but we would not add to it. This option says that there is plenty of room for other cuts. The US spent \$700 billion on military defense in 2018, a substan-

tial increase over the year before when it spent more than the next seven countries combined, according to the most recent comparisons available from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

There is no shortage of ideas on how to use the savings. The American Society of Civil Engineers, for example, estimated in 2017 that the US needs \$1.4 trillion of investments in its roads, bridges, electrical grid, airports, harbors, and drinking and wastewater systems. (China, by contrast, has built about 2.9 million miles of highways in the past three decades.) Moving military dollars to address even a fraction of these needs would be a win-win, this option says, providing tens of thousands of both white-collar and construction jobs while fixing our long-neglected infrastructure.

We could relieve student debt, freeing young adults to buy homes and more fully participate in the economy as well as helping coal miners and others in struggling industries train for new trades.

This option says that using savings from defense cuts to address our own neglected needs will make America *more* powerful by strengthening the economy that is just as critical as military power to our global influence.

Aggressively Use Trade Tariffs to Protect American-Made Products

This option says that one way to maintain our strength is through trade. It says that we should impose higher tariffs, or taxes, on foreign imports to protect American jobs—and our economy.

According to this option, unfair trade policies penalize American workers. China, for example, has used low wages, lax worker safety rules, and other “trade-distorting practices” to flood the US market with cheap imports, according to a 2018 report from the nonpartisan Economic Policy Institute. Our growing trade deficit, the report said, has cost us



©AP PHOTO/STEVE HELBER

Rolls of steel sit in a warehouse at a fabrication company in Chester, Virginia. Some US manufacturers are feeling the impact of tariffs of up to 25 percent that the United States has imposed on thousands of products imported from China, Europe, Mexico, Canada, India, and Russia, and of retaliatory tariffs that countries have put on US exports.

3.4 million jobs. This option says that raising tariffs on imports is one important way to level the playing field and keep US-made goods—and jobs—competitive.

US computer and electronics manufacturing has been particularly hard hit, with steel and aluminum close behind. The US had 216,400 steelworkers in 1998, providing good jobs in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and elsewhere. In 2016, Commerce Department figures put that number at just 139,800.

As recently as 2013, 13,000 Americans worked to make raw aluminum. Today, the Commerce Department says 90 percent of the aluminum used in America annually comes from overseas, and just 5,000 Americans remain employed in the industry. “We’d like to see the jobs come back,” Andy Meserve, president of United Steelworkers Local 9423 in Hawesville, Kentucky, told the *Washington Post*.

This option says that if other countries refuse to renegotiate trade deals, we should withdraw from treaties that are unfair to American workers and that contribute to the US trade deficit, which now stands at more than \$375 billion with China alone.

“America does not need coalitions to defend its trade interests,” said economist Michael Ivanovitch on CNBC.com. “Its huge, homogenous, and high-income markets of 325 million consumers offer plenty of negotiating leverage with any trade partner.”

Be a Role Model for Democracy and Human Rights, but Do Not Force Our Way of Life on Others

This option says that by solving our own problems, we can be a better role model for other countries. It says that setting an example is a more effective—and less costly—way to bring about change than imposing our values and way of life on others.

The US spends about \$50 billion annually on foreign aid, providing funding to foreign governments, militaries, and security forces, to international organizations such as the United Nations, and to nongovernmental organizations for a wide array of activities from backdoor diplomacy to disaster relief.

This option says that Americans are tired of trying to solve other nations’ problems when we have needs of our own. More than 550,000 Americans are homeless and living on the streets, in cars, or in encampments along freeways and rivers.

It says that many of the problems beyond US borders can be solved only by the countries themselves and that meddling carries the risk of making enemies as well as friends. The money spent on ill-conceived efforts to build democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq, this option says, would have accomplished far more if spent at home, retraining workers or relieving massive student debt.



Trade-Offs and Downsides

- Sharply reducing our defense spending could allow countries like Russia and China to replace us as the world's dominant power. Our military strength has kept this country safe from war in the homeland for more than 70 years.
- Pulling our troops out of Europe and East Asia could leave us without allies to come to our aid if we are endangered.
- Imposing tariffs could end up hurting American families by making everyday items like cutlery, towels, child-care products, electronics, and refrigerators more expensive and could provoke retaliatory tariffs that set off trade wars.
- Cutting back on foreign development and humanitarian aid may save us money in the short term but cost us in the long run. Poor countries can't afford our goods, and instability and scarce jobs push their citizens across borders—including ours—in search of work.

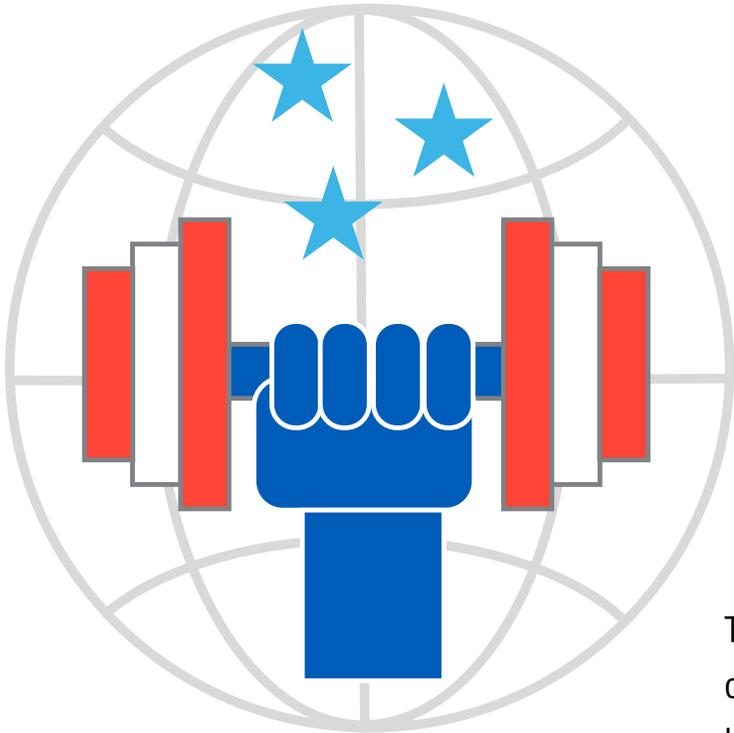


Questions for deliberation . . .

- 1 If we cut back on military spending, will we really be able to keep the country safe? What are the dangers of cutting corners on military preparedness?
- 2 Tariffs and similar trade restrictions can benefit American-based companies (and their employees), but they also reduce consumer choice and can drive up prices. In our own community, who might be harmed by tariffs?
- 3 This option suggests that the US move away from its role as the world's dominant power. What effect would this have on our economy and our security? Are we really ready to step back from this role?

Option 2:

Assert US Power



THIS OPTION SAYS that the best way to ensure our safety in a dangerous world is to invest in being the world's strongest power. It holds that the greatest threats to the United States—rogue states and terrorists, Russia's resurging military muscle, China's growing power—come from outside our borders. Since World War II, overpowering US military might has protected both the world order and our own security, freedom, and prosperity.

As Americans learned the hard way at Pearl Harbor and again in the 9/11 attacks, "It is in America's interest to strike enemies on their soil instead of waiting and seeing them hit you on your soil," Anders Fogh Rasmussen, a former NATO

secretary-general and Danish prime minister, told the *Atlantic's* Uri Friedman in 2016. "Experience shows that when the United States retreats or retrenches, it will leave behind a security vacuum, and that vacuum will be filled by the bad guys."

In recent years, this option says, potential and actual enemies have indeed expanded their militaries and ambitions. North Korea launched 16 missile tests in 2017. Russia, having annexed Crimea and intervened militarily in Ukraine, offered a safe haven for whistleblower Edward Snowden and now even stands accused of interfering in US elections.

America "is less admired, less respected and less feared than it needs to be, given how consequential a power we are," Aaron David Miller, a Middle East expert and adviser to former Republican and Democratic presidents, told *USA Today*.

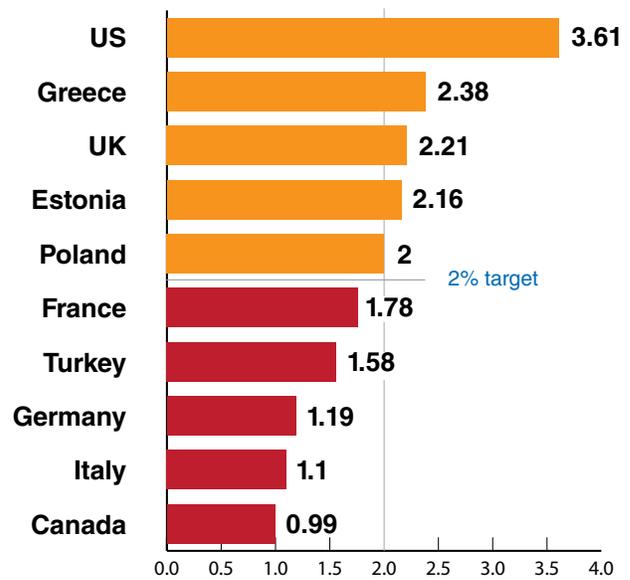
This option says we need to change that. One way to do so is to boost our military spending, including expanding and enhancing our aging nuclear arsenal.

We also need to strengthen NATO and other alliances. But according to this option, doing so doesn't mean we need anyone's permission to act. Osama bin Laden was killed in a firefight after the United States acted on its own, sending Navy Seals to storm his compound near Islamabad. The raid not only eliminated the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, but it reinforced America's power.

"Bin Laden himself once said that people bet on the strong horse," wrote columnist Nicholas Kristof in the *New York Times*. "The killing underscores that it's the United States that is the horse to bet on. Moreover, it sends a message that you mess with America at your peril, and that there will be consequences for a terror attack on the United States."

Yes, the United States spends more on defense than any other country. This option says that the payoff has been

NATO Spending as Percentage of GDP



Source: NATO, 2017

incalculable: We have not had a nuclear or world war in almost 70 years.

It is also important for the United States to maintain a strong economy. That's why this option says that we should avoid costly ventures such as democracy building or intervening in human rights abuses unless we are directly threatened. It also says that our NATO allies need to pay a bigger share for their defense than they do now. Being a superpower does not mean being a pushover.

The first role of government is to protect itself and its citizens against all threats, according to this option. Without that, nothing else is possible.

A Primary Drawback of This Option: *Bearing the burden of containing the world's crises by military means could bankrupt us in the long term.*



What We Should Do

Boost Spending on Nuclear and Other Weapons and on the Armed Services, and Use Military Force As We Deem It Necessary

This option says that to maintain our position as the world's dominant power, we should boost spending on defense weaponry from aircraft carriers to drones and increase the number of people in uniform. We should modernize and expand our outdated nuclear arsenal to project strength and deter attacks.

Russia, which has the only other nuclear arsenal that rivals ours, is updating and modernizing its weapons, as are we. But more worryingly, Russian president Vladimir Putin has boasted of adding new weapons, including very long-range nuclear torpedoes that could reach American port cities. China, whose military is second in size only to ours, recently announced that its military budget grew by eight percent in 2018, a larger increase than those of the previous two years. If we want to maintain our advantage, this option says, we must grow accordingly.

It also says that we should strongly increase our focus on cyber warfare. State-sponsored or terrorist hackers

could potentially bring down planes, sink ships, target our power grid, or blow up nuclear power plants. Or, as we've already learned, they can attack our government operations and our economy. The US indicted 13 Russians for attempting to interfere in our 2016 election. Chinese hackers have been indicted for trying to steal from US companies and seven Iranians were indicted for installing codes on a computer that controls a dam in New York State.

"Frankly, the United States is under attack — under attack by entities that are using cybernetics to penetrate virtually every major action that takes place in the United States," National Intelligence Director Daniel Coats told a Senate Select Committee intelligence hearing. "From US businesses, to the federal government, to state and local governments, the US is threatened by cyber attacks every day." Coats named cyber war as the top threat facing the US, and Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea as the most likely culprits.

Yes, Americans have grown weary of never-ending wars, cyber or conventional. That is why the United States needs a strong enough military to win any conflicts, this



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A rollout ceremony takes place at Gorbunov Aviation Plant in Kazan, Russia, August 16, 2018, to unveil a prototype model of the Tupolev Tu-22M3M long-range variable sweep-wing AI-equipped strike bomber, designed to destroy ground and sea targets with supersonic guided missiles and bombs at any time of day and in any weather, as well as able to deliver nuclear strikes. The first models are due to begin service with the Russian military in 2021.



option says, and it needs to use this force when we deem it necessary. Building a strong military and being willing to use it project enough power to deter attacks—a peacekeeping role that is not always recognized.

“Since World War II, US global leadership has rested in part on military might,” wrote Robert J. Samuelson in the *Washington Post*. “It has often provided the stability that gave political and economic policies the time to succeed. . . . The benefits of US defense spending are often underappreciated because they flowed silently from wars not fought and global order maintained.”

Make Allies Pay a Bigger Share for Their Defense

The United States contributed about 22 percent of the direct funding for NATO operations in 2018. When you consider indirect spending on defense—the amount that the United States and other NATO countries willingly spend on their own defense budgets—the United States pays a higher proportion still, about 70 percent of the 29 members’ total defense spending. There is, according to a NATO report, “an over-reliance by the Alliance as a whole on the United States for the provision of essential capabilities, including . . . surveillance and reconnaissance; air-to-air refueling; ballistic missile defense; and airborne electronic warfare.”

At the very least, this option says, all 29 alliance members need to meet the agreed-upon formula for covering direct costs by contributing two percent of their gross domestic product to pay for NATO’s operating expenses. Only four nations now do, with the United States—again—exceeding that goal at 3.57 percent of its GDP, followed by Greece, Britain, and Estonia. Poland comes close at 1.99 percent. Such wealthy countries as Germany, Canada, and Belgium trail behind.

Strong alliances play an important role in world security. NATO was formed after World War II to check the

expansion of the communist eastern bloc, led by the Soviet Union. No one wanted another world war.

At the time, America’s allies were still recovering from the war and rebuilding their economies. The United States provided aid for that effort through the Marshall Plan. We also picked up the lion’s share of maintaining NATO operating costs.

Today the European Union’s GDP rivals ours and China’s. This option says that, since they are now able to, they should pay more.

This option also says that the US should be more willing to use the strength of its markets and trade policy as another way of projecting power. We should restrict or even boycott goods from nations that are not dealing with us fairly in other areas, for instance over NATO, to apply pressure on them to behave as we wish.

Stop Trying to Impose Our Democratic Values and Human Rights Standards on Other Countries

If government’s fundamental role is to protect its citizens against threats, this option holds, then America should not get involved in costly and often ill-conceived interventions when there is no direct threat to our homeland. Doing so drains our resources, puts our servicemen and women at risk, and too often leads to unintended consequences. By staying out of troubled parts of the world where our presence may not even be welcome, we avoid making ourselves the target of resentment and blowback, including terrorism.

The US can be a voice for human rights and democracy, but it is naïve to think we can impose our way of life on other countries with different values and priorities than ours. To keep our country safe, we need allies and economic partners who will help us achieve our goals, even if they don’t reflect our values.



Trade-Offs and Downsides

- Maintaining the world's most powerful military and nuclear arsenal means spending enormous sums of taxpayer dollars, driving up our debt and deficits and leaving our own needs underfunded.
- Taking military action unilaterally could fuel anti-Americanism around the world and make us look like a bully to other countries.
- Expanding our nuclear arsenal could send a signal to countries like Russia, China, and North Korea that the nuclear arms race is back on. This could make the world more dangerous in the long term.
- Requiring our allies to pay more of NATO operating costs could undercut and even unravel alliances that have kept the peace for 70 years. Paying the lion's share, as we do now, reinforces our leadership role and ensures our safety.

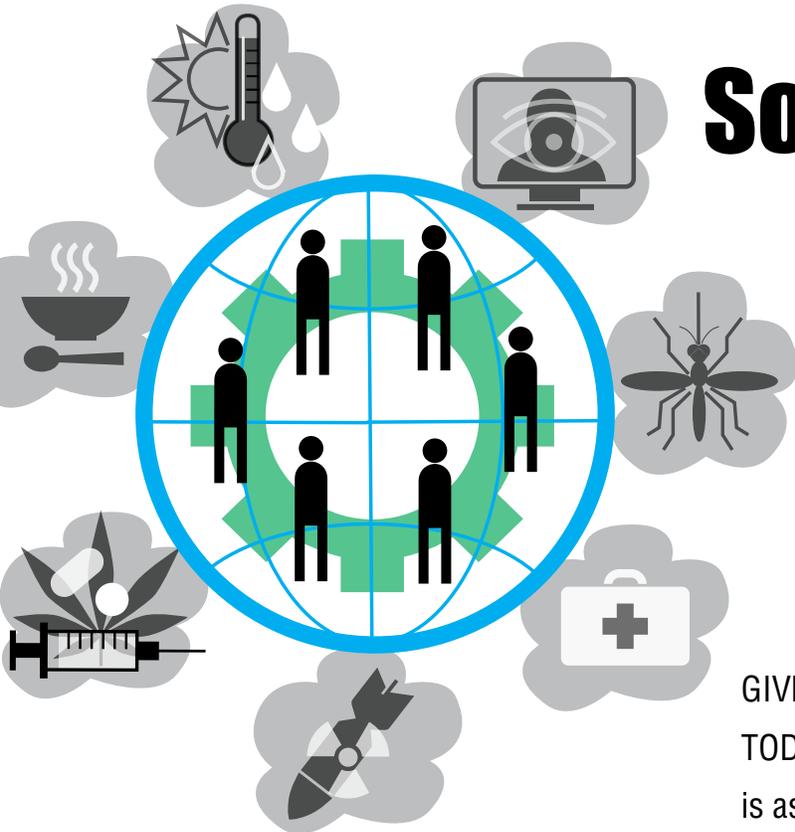


Questions for deliberation . . .

- 1 This option recommends substantial increases in defense spending, now and into the future. Where will we get the money? Are we willing to cut other spending or raise taxes to support this approach?
- 2 If we modernize our nuclear arsenal, won't other countries then try to keep up with us? Would this mean more nuclear weapons around the globe, making the world even more dangerous?
- 3 If we ignore tyranny and genocide in other countries, are we willing to accept more refugees and provide humanitarian relief to those who are suffering?

Option 3:

Work with Others to Solve Global Problems



GIVEN THE COMPLEX DANGERS WE FACE TODAY, THIS OPTION SAYS that our biggest threat is assuming the United States can go it alone whether by isolating ourselves or by acting unilaterally. In this view we can better solve today's crises by building alliances and emphasizing diplomacy and head off future crises by promoting democracy and human rights. If we have to use military force, according to this option, we should do so only in collaboration with others.

Beyond military threats, this option says that today's varied challenges include terrorism at home and abroad and record numbers of refugees fleeing human-made conflicts and climate-change-driven droughts. The emergence of an especially deadly flu strain would imperil all countries, as happened in the 1918 flu pandemic that killed millions around the globe. A highly infectious disease today could spread from an isolated rural village to any major city in as little as 36 hours, prompting the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to warn, "An outbreak anywhere is a threat everywhere."

This option says that it's naïve to think we can seal our borders against the world's chaos or use military strength alone to ward off all dangers. In the long term, it says, working with other nations to identify, respond to, and head off myriad threats will make our increasingly interconnected world safer for all.

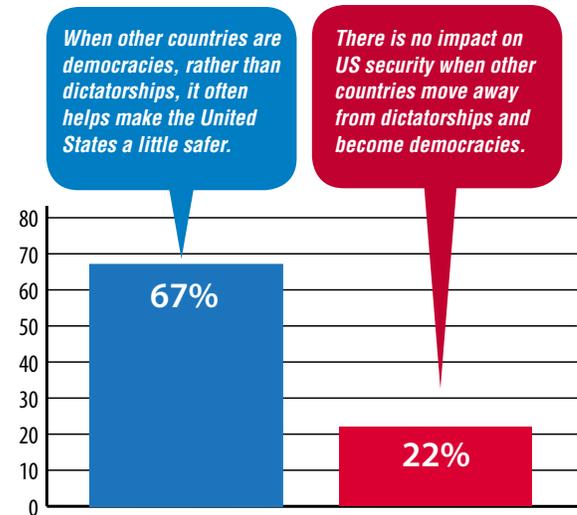
One example of successful collaboration is the dramatic progress that the United States and Russia made in reducing the overall number of nuclear weapons after the Cold War, from more than 64,000 in 1986 to fewer than 15,000 today.

But this option says we should not be complacent. Unsecured stockpiles could fall into terrorist hands, and rogue states like North Korea have been openly developing their own weapons. We should set an example by decommissioning more weapons and do everything possible, from diplomacy to foreign aid, to encourage other nations to do the same.

According to this option, we should expand and strengthen international alliances such as NATO, which has worked with us to keep the peace since World War II. And in collaboration with our allies, we should promote human rights because freedom and security worldwide mean a safer planet for all of us.

This option promotes both international trade agreements and foreign assistance to bolster healthy economies worldwide. Doing so makes us all more prosperous. Economic downturns elsewhere hurt our own economy by

Most Americans Think That More Democracies Abroad Make the United States Safer



Source: The Democracy Project, democracyprojectreport.org, 2018

depriving us of markets for our goods and driving migrants to our shores in search of jobs.

Building relationships, especially with people in different, even hostile, cultures through both trade and foreign aid also helps spread American values. If we don't do it, others—with different intents—will step into the vacuum. China, for example, is building a massive network of railroads, shipping lanes, and power grids linking itself with 70 countries across Asia, Africa, Europe, and Oceania. After the United States withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a 12-nation trade deal, in January 2017, Major General Jin Yinan, a strategist at China's National Defense University, said, "As the US retreats globally, China shows up."

America should show up, this option says.

A Primary Drawback of This Option:

Immediate crises can't wait for the long run; we need to be able to act unilaterally if we are threatened.



What We Should Do

Use Force Only in Collaboration, Reduce Nuclear Weapons, and Strengthen Alliances

This option says that Americans should rethink defense spending to put more emphasis on diplomacy. And if diplomacy fails, it says, the US should use force only in collaboration with others, as it did in the first Gulf War in 1991 to expel Iraq from Kuwait. Far from diminishing our influence—the coalition of 39 nations was US-led—having such broad-based support from traditional allies, regional powers, and even former enemies reinforced the moral authority of the cause. Furthermore, the coalition contributed military forces and covered \$54 billion of the estimated \$61 billion in costs. Assembling the coalition and winning United Nations' support was a diplomatic achievement in itself.

This option also says that the United States should employ diplomacy to reduce the spread of nuclear weapons, as it did successfully in earlier agreements with Russia. Specifically, it says, we should rejoin the Iran nuclear deal. In 2015, the United States and a negotiating group of five other nations reached a landmark agreement with Iran in which Iran agreed to halt its nuclear program in return for sanctions relief.

But the US recently renounced the deal—to the dismay of our negotiating partners—and reinstated sanctions. This option holds, with British prime minister Theresa May, that the Iran nuclear deal is “the best means of preventing Iran developing a nuclear weapon,” as she told the United Nations.

Alliances such as NATO, this option says, have played a vital role in preventing another world war. They are more important than ever to address the diverse dangers of today's complex world.

Take the threat that the US Department of Defense says now trumps all others: cyber warfare. NATO recently staged an exercise involving cyber warfare teams from 21

member nations. The exercise drew on lessons learned when member Estonia in 2010 became the target of the world's first large-scale cyber attack, believed to have originated in neighboring Russia. The attack on the tiny Balkan nation disabled the websites of its government, political parties, newspapers, banks, and corporations. That NATO nations could learn from this crisis and cooperate in finding ways to detect, respond, or prevent future attacks is invaluable.

Equally crucial are international alliances to address nonmilitary threats. The Paris Climate Accord, for example, was the world's first joint attempt to head off or mitigate the heat waves, droughts, crop failures, and measurably rising seas that already are occurring and that will grow worse as the world continues to warm. The recent decision by this country to withdraw from the accord not only hurts efforts to address a global threat that requires collective action but eliminates a powerful counterweight to the accord's next most powerful member, China. As Chinese President Xi Jinping said when America withdrew, the accord “now has to deal with China on its own, and the US has no influence.”

According to this option, the United States is most powerful when it works with others, persuading and leading, rather than going it alone.

Promote Free Trade Worldwide through International Agreements

This option says that free trade is good for world relations, creating jobs, reducing prices, and fostering a stable economic world order in which US companies can safely operate. We should therefore use international trade agreements to promote free trade and spur economic growth worldwide. Free trade, this option says, allows economies elsewhere to flourish, building stronger neighbors and creating markets that can afford our goods. China, for example, is the world's top soybean buyer, and Canada



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imports about \$25 billion in US agricultural products each year.

In an interdependent world, one of the best ways to achieve stability and order is to provide freedom and opportunity for people everywhere.

Join with Other Countries to Improve Human Rights

In the last 70 years, the United States has helped maintain world order not just through military might and economic clout but by spreading democracy, free trade, and human rights. Autocratic leaders who terrorize their own people breed unrest, destabilize their neighbors, and pose a danger to global peace. When that happens, this option says, we should act.

“America is a world leader, and it should be playing a role in making the world a better place for the seven billion

International trade agreements to promote free trade foster a stable economic world order, according to Option Three.

people living in it, and especially for the nearly one billion living in extreme poverty,” wrote Peter Singer, a bioethics professor at Princeton University, in the *Washington Post*.

Sub-Saharan Africa used to be the poster child for world poverty. Today, the continent is the face of hope. New malaria infections have been halved, and once astronomical numbers of child mortality and AIDS deaths have fallen dramatically.

This option says that Africa’s progress shows what foreign aid can accomplish—and that America, the world’s largest donor, should continue to provide it.

It is an interconnected world. “If we don’t make these investments in global health,” philanthropist Melinda Gates told the *Atlantic* magazine, “my argument to people is, you’re going to see a lot more things like Ebola in our own country, and we’ll be dealing with them in our own health clinics because borders are so porous.”

This option says America needs to protect human rights and work together with our allies because freedom and prosperity worldwide mean a safer planet for all.

Sudanese dockers unload bags of sorghum (cereal) from one of two US ships carrying humanitarian aid supplies provided by the US development agency USAID, at Port Sudan on June 5, 2018. The United States is the largest single donor to the world food program in Sudan and regularly distributes food aid to the East African country.



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Trade-Offs and Downsides

- Cooperation sounds good, but diplomacy is a slow process in a world where other countries don't necessarily share our priorities and our values. If the US waits to take action, we end up letting serious problems fester and we allow our enemies the time to become more dangerous.
- Entering into arms reductions agreements with hostile countries like Iran and Russia could leave us vulnerable if they cheat.
- Free-trade agreements allow low-cost foreign goods and countries with cheaper wages to undercut American-made products and companies, thereby hurting American workers.
- We can't force our values on others or persuade other nations to establish democracies or respect human rights. Trying to do so may do more harm than good; it could risk being seen as disrespectful of other cultures and invite backlash.



Questions for deliberation . . .

- 1 Many countries do not share our values, and some resent America's prosperity and power. Can we trust these countries to obey international agreements?
- 2 This option suggests working with other nations to tackle major international problems, which is one of the main goals of the United Nations. Is the UN an effective problem solver? Why or why not?
- 3 Free trade can help foreign companies by giving them access to US markets and at the same time hurt US companies that have to pay their workers more. Are we willing to see some US companies fail? How will we help workers who are displaced?

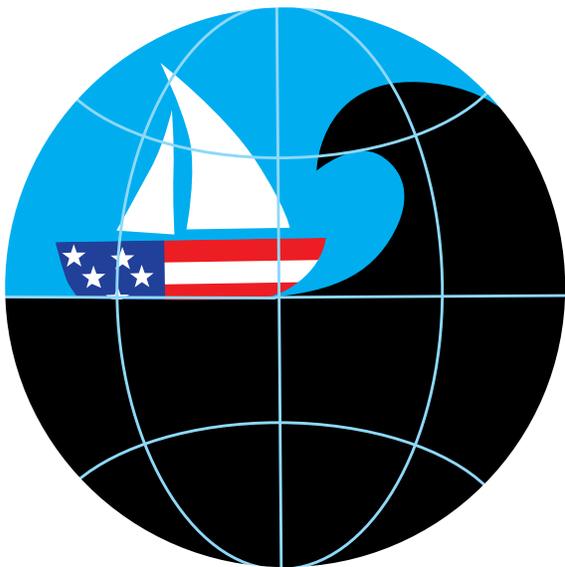
Closing Reflections

AMERICA TODAY faces a diverse and daunting set of threats from overseas. And the best ways to keep our country safe are not always clear. No matter which direction we choose, there are risks and trade-offs.

Before ending your forum, take some time to revisit some of the central questions this issue guide raises:

- Should we invest in maintaining our role as the world's dominant power to ensure our safety in a dangerous world? Or should we focus more on investing in and rebuilding our own country and stop trying to police the world?
- Should we form alliances with other countries that make the world safer even if we do not get everything we want? Or should we cut back on international agreements because these could limit our options and let other countries take advantage of us?
- Should we put more emphasis on strengthening our military so we can defend ourselves against powers like Russia and China? Or should we put more emphasis on diplomacy, building alliances, and promoting democracy and human rights because, in the long run, this is what makes the world safer?
- Should the United States be a robust and active champion of human rights and democracy around the world? Or should we step back and take a more measured role, realizing that other countries will not adopt our way of life unless and until they are ready to do so?

For almost 70 years, the United States has been the world's most powerful and influential leader. What are the costs and trade-offs to our own needs of continuing to serve as the world's sole superpower? As we look to a changing future, where should we invest our money, our people, and our reputation?



Summary

Option 1:

Make America's Needs Our Top Priority

This option says the United States has focused too much on policing and protecting the world and not enough on shoring up its own prosperity and taking care of its own people. It is time to put our country's needs first. The United States spends billions on defense and foreign aid while, at home, bridges and highways are crumbling, students face mountains of debt, and people go bankrupt trying to pay their medical bills. It is time to prioritize our own country's needs.

A Primary Drawback

We can turn our backs on the world's chaos, but we can't seal our borders from its impacts.

ACTIONS

Sharply cut defense spending so we can use money on infrastructure repair, education, and health care.

Monitor and maintain the reliability of our already huge nuclear arsenal without increasing its size or developing new warheads.

Withdraw troops from Germany and South Korea—wealthy and stable countries that can put up their own defense—and apply savings at home.

Aggressively use trade tariffs to protect American-made products and pull out of trade deals that give foreign goods open access to US markets.

Make the United States a model for democracy and human rights, but don't try to force our way of life on others.

What else?

DRAWBACKS

Countries like China and Russia could enhance their military power while we fall behind.

Other countries, even smaller ones like North Korea, could develop more powerful, sophisticated weapons.

Keeping US troops around the world projects power and keeps us and our allies safer.

This could lead to trade wars that hurt American companies and drive up costs for struggling American families.

Tyranny and human rights abuses eventually lead to war and revolution, creating dangerous international instability and refugee crises.

The trade-off?

Summary

Option 2: Assert US Power

This option says that the United States cannot afford to ignore what's happening outside our borders—we need to remain the world's strongest power. Russia and China are flexing their military and economic muscles. North Korea has tested missiles and nuclear weapons. Americans fear foreign terrorist attacks both at home and abroad. Even our robust economy is threatened by unfair trade practices, and our democracy is put at risk by outside election meddling. Investing in being the world's dominant power helps ensure stability in a dangerous world—and protects our freedom and prosperity by fighting threats at their source rather than on our shores.

A Primary Drawback

Bearing the burden of containing the world's crises by military power entangles us in wars that have little to do with our own safety and that could bankrupt us in the long term.

ACTIONS

Boost spending on defense weaponry and the armed services, and use military force as we deem it necessary, no matter what other countries think.

Modernize our nuclear arsenal to deter North Korea and stay ahead of Russia and other powers that threaten us.

Make our allies in NATO and other military alliances pay a bigger share for their defense.

Boycott goods made in countries that are not behaving as we wish.

Ignore human rights abuses in other countries as long as they don't threaten us.

What else?

DRAWBACKS

Increased military spending takes money from education and other needs, leaving us with an economy groaning under debt and with pockets of extreme poverty.

This could spark a new arms race, leading to spiraling costs and raising the threat of a renewed arms race worldwide.

Paying the lion's share as we do now reinforces our leadership role and guarantees the future of alliances that have kept the peace for decades.

This could help some US companies but hurt Americans whose jobs depend on imported parts or foreign-made goods.

Over the long run, this leads to wars and refugee crises and would tarnish our moral authority.

The trade-off?

Summary

Option 3:

Work with Others to Solve Global Problems

Given the varied and complex dangers we face today, this option says that our biggest threat is assuming that the United States can go it alone—whether by isolating ourselves or acting unilaterally. Today’s global challenges include migration, refugees, cyberterrorism, and more. Deadly new infectious diseases and the effects of climate change remind us that the natural world poses its own threats that don’t respect borders. By emphasizing diplomacy and building alliances, we can better solve complex crises and head off future ones. In the long run, promoting democracy and human rights makes the world both safer and more prosperous.

A Primary Drawback

This means counting on other countries and trusting them to keep their agreements with us. But we should not be naïve. The United States should be able to act unilaterally to protect our own interests.

ACTIONS

Rethink the balance between defense spending and diplomacy, and use force only in collaboration with others.

Reach agreements to reduce the spread of nuclear weapons as we did in the Iran deal and in treaties with Russia.

Expand and strengthen international alliances such as NATO, which have helped keep the peace since World War II.

Promote free trade with all countries. International trade agreements benefit consumers and American businesses.

Promote human rights in collaboration with our allies through diplomacy and foreign aid because freedom and prosperity worldwide mean a safer planet for all.

What else?

DRAWBACKS

This could tie our hands when we need to protect ourselves or want to act strongly to prevent human rights abuses in cases like Syria or Rwandan ethnic cleansing.

Reaching such deals means trusting nations that probably should not be trusted and, by scrapping sanctions, improving their economies.

We can’t allow prosperous European nations to let us foot the bill. They should pay their own way.

Free trade endangers US companies and their employees by letting low-cost foreign goods into our market.

Many Americans are struggling. It’s not fair to pour money into helping people worldwide when so many of our own live in poverty and lack health care.

The trade-off?

The National Issues Forums

The National Issues Forums (NIF) is a network of organizations that bring together citizens around the nation to talk about pressing social and political issues of the day. Thousands of community organizations, including schools, libraries, churches, civic groups, and others, have held forums designed to give people a public voice in the affairs of their communities and their nation.

Forum participants engage in deliberation, which is simply weighing options for action against things held commonly valuable. This calls upon them to listen respectfully to others, sort out their views in terms of what they most value, consider courses of action and their disadvantages, and seek to identify actionable areas of common ground.

Issue guides like this one are designed to frame and support these conversations. They present varying perspectives on the issue at hand, suggest actions to address identified problems, and note the trade-offs of taking those actions to remind participants that all solutions have costs as well as benefits.

In this way, forum participants move from holding individual opinions to making collective choices as members of a community—the kinds of choices from which public policy may be forged or public action may be taken at community as well as national levels.

Forum Questionnaire

If you participated in this forum, please fill out a questionnaire, which is included in this issue guide or can be accessed online at www.nifi.org/questionnaires. If you are filling out the enclosed questionnaire, please return the completed form to your moderator or to the National Issues Forums Institute, 100 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459.

If you moderated this forum, please fill out a Moderator Response sheet, which is online at www.nifi.org/questionnaires.

Other Topics and Ordering Information

Recent topics in this series include the opioid epidemic, immigration, safety and justice, economic security, energy, and end of life issues.

For more information, please visit www.nifi.org.

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Keeping America Safe: What Is Our Greatest Threat? How Should We Respond?

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