



TOPIC → Security Discussion Guide



Security

When American Airlines Flight 11 struck the World Trade Center at 8:45am on September 11th 2001, America's sense of security was shattered.

For nearly two hundred years, other than the attack on Pearl Harbor, no war involving foreign powers had been fought on U.S. soil. While the World Wars, Korea, Vietnam, and the first Gulf War had taken U.S. lives, Americans at home remained safe, seemingly isolated from dangerous global events. But with the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Americans felt a new vulnerability, a frightening sense of connection to global events. Amidst the grief and shock that followed September 11th, all Americans were forced to confront the question of our security.

What does it really mean to be secure as a nation? A range of answers to this question are possible.

- Some argue that American security is the security of U.S. territory from external threat -- that the fifty states must be protected from attacks by foreign powers.
- A second view is that security requires the protection of U.S. interests and citizens abroad. Such a view requires the use of American power to safeguard American allies and economic interests overseas.
- A third view sees connections between American well-being and that of others around the globe. This third approach suggests an American role in maintaining global stability, protecting others from threats of war, famine, or

Some Basic Policy Choices For The U.S. In Iraq

1. Increase the number of U.S. troops in Iraq so as to better address the current security threats in the country.
2. Continue the current strategy of working, with only a few allies, to build democracy and a new nation in Iraq.
3. Create a multilateral basis for going forward, preferably under U.N. control, to lessen the burden on the U.S. and increase legitimacy.
4. Create a state in Iraq that can, to the greatest extent possible, take over from us. Such a state might not live up to the dream of a unified and democratic Iraq, but it would lead to an end of direct involvement of U.S. troops.

abuse, and even addressing non-traditional security threats such as environmental dangers.

- Finally, after September 11th, many have come to see U.S. security as a domestic as well as a foreign policy issue and stress the importance of preventing threats from within as well as those from overseas.

Throughout American history, Americans have answered these questions about security in very different ways. In his farewell address upon leaving the Presidency in 1796, George Washington counseled America to "steer clear of permanent alliances." His strategy of looking inward and avoiding foreign contact as much as possible was largely followed for the next hundred and twenty years.

Despite an intervention in World War I, America again took an isolationist stance in the interwar period, refusing to ratify the Charter of the League of Nations. With the rise of the Soviet Union after World War II, American leaders decided security was dependent on foreign alliances like NATO and active intervention in Korea and Vietnam to prevent the spread of communism. The U.S. tried to prevent nuclear war by matching Soviet power and stopping other nations from developing nuclear capabilities.

After the Soviet collapse in 1991, America's power was unrivaled and its security largely unchallenged by existing governments. But new threats of terror attacks and bombings and use of weapons of mass destruction come from so-called rogue states like Afghanistan controlled by the Taliban and others not bound by international rules of conduct.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

PRESENT U.S. POLICY

The present U.S. national security policy has at least three key elements. First, it recognizes that America is the world's sole superpower and seeks to increase American power through military development and deployment. In this view, America largely rejects the need for foreign approval or multilateral cooperation. For example, when the Bush administration

Challenges Of Nation Building: The Afghanistan Example

Afghanistan under Taliban rule shows vividly how a failed state without rule of law and an effective government can allow for the operation of terrorist groups, facilitate organized crime or drug trafficking, and result in significant abuses to local citizens. After the events of September 11th, the United States launched a military campaign in Afghanistan to uproot al Qaeda and overthrow the Taliban. That campaign was largely successful. However as late as December, American military forces were still mounting major efforts against regrouping Taliban forces.

The United States is deeply involved in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. A new government under the leadership of Hamid Karzai is now in place, and local leaders are putting great emphasis

perceived a threat from Iraq and the U.N. refused to approve military action, the U.S. built a small coalition with strong support from the British government to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime through force.

The second key element of this strategy is the idea of "preemptive self-defense," or preventing attacks on the U.S. before they happen. The international legal standard has only allowed states to attack one another in self-defense when they were already under attack themselves or about to be attacked. Current American strategy sees a need to act first, preventing attacks before they occur. Supporters of this strategy suggest that the possible death toll of a nuclear or biological attack is so great that waiting to respond until attacked is unconscionable. Preemptive self-defense requires that the U.S. stop states and terrorist groups that may present a danger to the U.S. - possibly through military action - before they are able to threaten the U.S. directly.

Promoting Democracy

A third element of the current U.S. security strategy sees freedom and justice as common goals of all peoples and tries to support these aspirations by championing democracy around the globe. History shows that democratic states do not go to war with one another. Therefore, the more democracies, the less likely it is that America will be attacked. Additionally, democracy tends to foster the rule of law and good governance -- improving the quality of life of others and reducing the likelihood that rogue states will support terrorist groups. There are many ways to promote democracy, ranging from linking foreign aid with benchmarks of democracy to undertaking military action and replacing non-democratic governments.

WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

Critics argue that an approach that focuses on unilateral, or sole U.S. power largely ignores the role that multilateral institutions and allies can play in making America more secure. Though institutions like the U.N. may constrain the U.S., these groups also can prevent others from acting in ways that may hurt or threaten America. Additionally, by refusing to give other

on a new constitution. Yet, Afghanistan is still unstable. Warlords control most regions outside the capital city of Kabul and pay only slight deference to President Karzai. Government, transportation, education, and economic infrastructure remain in a state of collapse.

Recent U.S. National Security Policy Examples

Intervention with Allies: The First Gulf War -- When Iraq invaded Kuwait, the U.S. created a broad international coalition to oppose Iraq in 1991 after concerted diplomatic effort. After the Iraqi army suffered strong initial defeats, pressure on the U.S. from other countries in the coalition helped influence the U.S. to end the war quickly.

Pullback: Somalia -- In 1993, at U.N. request, the U.S. sent troops to Somalia to prevent tribal fighting from interfering with international efforts to relieve a famine. After a breakdown of governance and order, 16 U.S. soldiers were killed and some

countries a meaningful say or role in global decisions such as the war in Iraq, the U.S. is unable to benefit from the financial and military help those nations could give. Other critics also say it will cost too much to maintain U.S. military superiority. As a result, needs at home could suffer.

Other Nations

A second criticism, specifically related to the idea of preemptive self-defense is that, while the U.S. may benefit from preventing attacks by rogue states, other nations may rely on the same principle in ways that could be harmful to U.S. security. If other countries see preemption as a new way to justify international conflict, the number of those conflicts may increase, potentially threatening the U.S. and its interests or requiring intervention to stop conflicts elsewhere.

Third, the strategy of focusing on democratic values has been criticized as an expensive form of American overseas involvement. As America spreads its reach, building nations in its own image or pushing other countries to become more like America, the U.S. may find itself over-committed. The costs -- both financial and military -- may be very high. Critics also say that this policy runs the risk of angering citizens in other nations who do not support U.S. involvement and goals.

POLICY IN ACTION: THE CASE OF IRAQ

The most obvious place where these crucial questions about national security are being played out is in Iraq. In March 2003, after failing to get U.N. backing for military action in Iraq, the U.S., with the support of a small coalition, invaded Iraq and toppled the government of Saddam Hussein.

A number of reasons were advanced for the U.S. war in Iraq. Primary was the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction in the hands of a dictator like Saddam Hussein. A second reason was the need to protect the human rights of Iraqi citizens. A third rationale was the desire to promote democracy in the Middle East. A final set of justifications is based in U.S. economic interests - particularly access to

were dragged through the streets of the capital, leading to a complete U.S. withdrawal. Rival tribal leaders proceeded to carve up the country among themselves.

Non-intervention: Rwanda --

Two days after the Somalia tragedy, the U.S. argued against a proposal to send U.N. troops to stop the ethnic massacre underway in Rwanda. One hundred observers were sent, and the genocide intensified and spread. Nearly 800,000 people were killed.

oil.

The United States is deeply committed in Iraq. By mid-November 2003, there were nearly 130,000 U.S. soldiers in Iraq, with 422 Americans and estimates of 4,000 to 20,000 Iraqi civilians killed in action. Each month of the war and ongoing occupation costs an average of \$4.4 billion. And Congress has approved President Bush's request for \$87.5 billion to pay for the occupation of Iraq.

ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE

In thinking about U.S. policy in Iraq, there are a number of important issues we must face. How we respond to these issues, and their effects in Iraq, will be essential to the outcome of our efforts there and are likely to impact American national security from then on.

Increase or Decrease?

A first crucial issue is whether to increase or decrease the U.S. military presence in the country. Throughout the fall of 2003, resistance to and attacks on U.S. and international personnel increased and became more coordinated. The Bush administration has taken the position that present deployment levels -- approximately 132,000 soldiers as of November 2003 -- are sufficient.

- Critics -- Democrats and Republicans -- have offered different proposals. Some call for a significant increase in U.S. presence to deal with security threats and bolster stability. Others suggest a significant decrease in U.S. military personnel in Iraq or even a complete withdrawal.
- More troops in Iraq would enhance security, but might also lead to a further backlash and more attacks against U.S. forces. In addition, more troops would increase costs and might require further reserve units to be deployed.
- A related question is how long U.S. troops should remain in Iraq, and how do we define a successful mission?

How International?

A second important issue relates to the level of international involvement in Iraq. The current

approach is that the U.S., with some help from Britain, should have a largely exclusive role in the occupation.

- One alternative would be more active efforts to seek support -- both financial and personnel -- from other countries, so as to share the burden and to internationalize the effort.
- A second option would be to allow a greater role for the U.N. in the occupation and political reconstruction of Iraq.
- Both of these possibilities would presumably increase the legitimacy of the occupation by involving a broader range of actors and would decrease the costs to the U.S. However, both options likewise would also require the U.S. share power and influence in the country.

How Democratic?

A third issue relates to the promotion of democracy in Iraq. The present U.S. strategy is to actively create a constitution and promote democratic elections.

- Should the creation of a democratic Iraq be part of the U.S. mission so the U.S. doesn't leave until an effective government is up and running? Doing so is likely to increase the costs and length of U.S. involvement. Failure to do so might lead to an Islamic theocracy in Iraq, possibly similar to Iran.
- If the U.S. should build a democratic Iraq, how can it best meet the needs of Iraq's different religious and ethnic populations?
- Finally, should the U.S. push for early elections? Doing so might allow the U.S. to exit early. However, if elections take place before the country is stable, it might lack fairness or even lead to the election of a radical government opposed to the U.S.

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