



# Center for Nonprofit Strategies

Clear Actionable Advice.

## Reframing Engagement: Interviews with Congressional Staffers Summary of Results

### Introduction

This report summarizes the findings from a qualitative research study conducted as part of the Reframing Engagement project conducted by Citizens for Global Solutions and funded by Connect US. The study was designed to ascertain the views of interview respondents and their Senators/Congresspersons regarding the role of the United States in the world, and their office's basic approach to foreign policy. During the interviews, we also tested some frames and concepts based on the frames promoted in the *US in the World* guide. These ideas and frames were developed through a series of meetings with advocacy and messaging experts.

The research study involved in-depth interviews with nine Congressional staffers and one Representative. The staffers that we interviewed were foreign policy legislative aides, legislative directors, or staffers appointed by a Senator or Representative to convey his/her views to the interviewer. Staffers were asked to represent the views of their Senate/House office, and to compare and contrast their viewpoint with that of their colleagues in other offices.

These in-depth interviews allowed us to explore the range of opinions in Congress the ideas and values in which these opinions are anchored. They revealed themes and patterns in how Congressional offices think about the role of the United States in global affairs, and what kinds of arguments they regard as credible and motivating. The results of this research, however, must be interpreted within the qualitative frame of reference. Due to the research design, the small number of participants and the selective recruitment procedure, the results from this study cannot be interpreted quantitatively or generalized to any target population group.

The list of people interviewed appears as Appendix 1. Six of the interview respondents represented Democratic Senate and House offices; the remaining were Republican staffers. A copy of the guide is attached as Appendix 2. To convey the flavor and language of the interviews, we have included some paraphrased quotes.<sup>1</sup> They are marked with an [R] or [D] to indicate the party affiliation of the Congressional office.

### Role of US in the World

#### *Lone Superpower*

Virtually all respondents felt that the US plays a critical role in the world; some noted that the US is the sole remaining superpower in the world and therefore must take the lead in critical matters. Some fear that US dominance may be waning, but most Congressional offices seem to think that the US will continue to dominate the world stage in the foreseeable future.

*The US is the sole remaining superpower and that is something we need to maintain. It also means we must take an active role throughout the world. [R]*

---

<sup>1</sup> To protect participants' confidentiality, these interviews were not taped or transcribed. These quotes are drawn from the interviewer's notes.

*We definitely have a strong presence. We have taken the lead on terrorism in the Middle East and on reforming the UN and ridding it of corruption. Our monetary contribution also reflects our leadership – we give a considerable proportion of our budget, much more than other countries. [R]*

*The US is the leading country and most influential for preserving stability and democracy. [D]*

Many respondents said that the United States' dominant position also entails some responsibility. Most often respondents said that our primary responsibility is to preserve stability in the world by intervening when domestic or regional conflicts get out of hand and start affecting the "balance of power" in the world. This does not imply that the US should intervene in every conflict from a humanitarian perspective, but that it should use its judgment and discretion to make these decisions.

*The Senator likes to say: We're not the world's policeman but we are the world's enforcer. The difference is that policemen must respond to all crises (i.e. whenever requested) but enforcers enforce world opinion when they perceive a threat. As the only existing superpower in the world, we do have many responsibilities – more than we can handle. Whenever there is any kind of crisis, everybody's first thought is that the US should respond, but we have to choose what we do. [D]*

*Now that the Soviet Union has collapsed, the US has been elevated to the status of a hyper-power (bigger than superpower), because it is the only nation that can act in certain ways. It should not be a policeman, but it should use its power to act for our national interests and maintain the balance of power. [R]*

*The US is the driving force on many issues. The Senator believes that this gives us an opportunity and a responsibility to have a positive impact, and he travels extensively to learn more and make that happen. [R]*

Some respondents felt that the US also has a responsibility to export its political philosophy and values. Many of the people who espoused this view equated democracy and free-market capitalism with peace and prosperity of nations.

*We see America as an exporter of our political philosophy, cultural ideas and goods. America is playing that role to a large degree – we're making incremental progress although sometimes there are setbacks. [D]*

*The Senator believes we should defend our principles abroad. In America we take the benefits of a free society for granted. People call to thank us for having a job or a car, not for maintaining freedom of speech or religion; but it is unlikely that they would have their economic prosperity without the free society. We need to extend the benefits of a free society both here and in other countries. [D]*

#### *National Interest and the Greater Good*

Congressional staffers and members tend to believe that citizens want governments to use their international standing and power to represent and promote their national interest. So, preserving and promoting US interests is always part of the United States' role in the world, and some saw maintaining stability in the world as working in service of the US national interest.



*While theoretically, the concept of global governance sounds good, most citizens believe that their government should act on the international stage to defend and bolster their national interests. [R]*

### *Three Camps*

According to one respondent, Congress is roughly divided into three camps—the Neocons, the Liberal Internationalists, and the Pragmatists—which differ in their approach to US foreign policy. A fourth camp—the Isolationists—also exists, but is not particularly influential right now. These camps have very different views on what role the US should play on the global stage, and they are driven by different values and approaches to foreign policy.

*Most members of Congress agree that the US has an important role to play, that it is an indispensable world force. They disagree on specific policies. There is a tension between activist/militaristic people and those who think the US should exercise more soft power. [D]*

These three camps are described below. This analysis of Congress was offered by only one interview respondent; however it is presented here because it is useful for organizing and understanding the range of views on a broad range of topics.

*Neocons* feel that the US has an obligation to spread its values and promote free societies. To this group, democracy and free-market capitalism is the path to prosperity and a better world. While most Members share this view to some extent (at a minimum they agree that democratic and free governments are better than dictatorships), the Neocons believe this in a more uncompromising way and support the use of force to bring about US-like systems. Most people who see themselves as Neocons live on the Republican side of the aisle, but members of both parties share key elements of this philosophy, such as the idea we should use our foreign policy to promote our values and world vision.

*Liberal Internationalists* are also driven by ideology. Their ideology calls for the US to work in a principled fashion for the good of the world community (not simply national interest). This ideology is best represented by the Clinton administration's expansive foreign policy approach. Liberals, like many others including some Neocons, believe that the US should take the lead on humanitarian aid and international intervention in times of crisis. However, they firmly eschew the use of force unless sanctioned by the international community. Most Liberal Internationalists are Democrats.

*Pragmatists* believe that the role of the US is to further its national interest. They vary in how widely they define national interest, and how closely they link it to the interest of other nations and peoples. These people are not isolationists; they recognize that globalization has made isolation impossible but they are driven more by practical outcomes of actions rather than any specific ideology. Pragmatists are well-distributed on both sides of the aisle. Many seem to have stances on some foreign policy issues that are of interest to them personally or their constituents, but they often vote along party lines on other issues.

*Used to be that the Democrats wanted to have a small army but use it everywhere, and the Republicans wanted a huge army but wanted to keep it at home. But this doesn't apply any more. [R]*

*Senate offices are split down the middle. A lot of them take the moral tone and tell others what they ought to do, and don't pay attention to our own flaws and struggles. Others have a more empathetic tone. [D]*



## Objectives of US Foreign Policy

### *Three Perspectives*

When asked what should be the main objectives of US foreign policy, many respondents thought the question too broad because the objective depends upon the country and the issue. In general, their responses fell into three categories that can easily be linked to the philosophical orientations described above.

Consistent with the Neocon ideology, some felt that the role of US foreign policy is to preserve the US and the values it represents and to promote these values in the rest of the world, since this is the best way for the US to improve the lives of the people of the world.

*Our foreign policy should be about creating a better world, i.e. making people's lives better, by exporting our system. [D]*

Another point of view focused on preserving national security and national interest, and administering some humanitarian aid (particularly in ways that can be linked to national security and national interest). This is consistent with a more pragmatic approach to foreign policy.

*Our first priority should be to preserve the US and what it stands for – freedom, democracy, etc. Next we should expand freedom and democracy or at least give people the opportunity to have these things. Finally, we should try to improve quality of life for Americans and everyone else. [D]*

In keeping with a more Internationalist perspective, some responded that the goal of US foreign policy should be to preserve peace and stability in the world, alleviate poverty, and encourage more participation in the world community by all nations.

*There are three foreign policy objectives. The first is making the world more peaceful and stable so it doesn't threaten us or anyone else, i.e. generally, reducing violence. The second is alleviating world poverty. There are 3.5 billion people who live in abject poverty and helping them out of it is important and ties in to the goal of achieving stability. The third is to make more people and countries invested in the first two goals. These problems are not for the US to solve alone, but we do have to get others involved and work cooperatively with them to address these issues. [D]*

It is important to note that many interviewees gave responses that combined two of those perspectives, or even all three of them. Furthermore, espousal of these objectives does not automatically place the respondent in any specific camp because there was considerable variation in how they would want to achieve those objectives.

## US Reputation

These interviews suggest that most Senators and Representatives are aware of reports that the United States' popularity in many parts of the world is waning, but they are not sure what to make of this information or how big a problem it is. The level of concern on this topic varies widely, with Democrats generally more concerned than Republicans.

*Our reputation is mixed, depending on the country and our relations with that country. Plenty of people hate America. [R]*



*The level of concern varies. There's probably more concern in the Democratic Party, but overall I'm not sure how wide or deep that concern is. Domestic policy is what Congress is most concerned about. [D]*

A few respondents also cautioned that concern about this issue is hard to gauge because most Senators and Representatives do not express it publicly. The prevailing norm is that our policies should be governed by our national interest, not how they impact our reputation; and that the US should be brave enough to take unpopular actions. Therefore, while many Members will privately admit to concerns about America's declining reputation in the world community, they will not do so publicly.

Another reason why Members do not acknowledge their concern over the United States' international reputation is that they aren't sure of the causes and remedies. The prevailing opinion seems to be that some resentment against the US is inevitable because:

- The US now has to act forcefully to preserve its national interest and this is making people nervous. To take quick and forceful action, it is leading smaller coalitions, and this new approach is angering some countries.
- The US is the only superpower ("big dog") on the world stage now that influences all other nations' economies, so people are bound to feel wary and resentful. Because so much is expected of us, we cannot hope to please everyone.
- Other reasons were also cited. One respondent noted that there has always been anger toward the US, and waning US cultural and economic hegemony is now allowing it to be expressed more freely. Another argued that US reputation waxes and wanes periodically and this current decline is just part of that cycle.

*Our reputation has become tarnished over Iraq, but Iraq is more a catalyst than a cause. We've always had some disagreements with our EU allies. Due to a change in our national interest, we've been acting more forcefully, which is seen as imperialistic and has been used to stir Anti-American sentiment. [R]*

*The Congressman is very concerned about declining opinion of America (as evident in polls), but this is an unavoidable consequence of the strong stance that we're taking with respect to the War on Terror. We're no longer the shining city on the hill. [R]*

*I don't believe that our reputation is declining – it does ebb and flow somewhat. ... Because America is the "big kid on the block", it's an easy target for the evils of the world. Everyone has a different view of how it should behave and so we can't please everyone. [R]*

Some think this is just a public relations problem. They believe that:

- The US needs to better explain its values and motives and people from other countries need access to free and fair press coverage (instead of the propaganda their governments dish out).
- The administration needs to be more charming and display a better attitude.

*Some people believe that we are protecting ourselves and the rest of the world. Others think that we intervene too much for selfish interests. People don't understand America. They haven't ever been here and just believe the stereotypes or what they are told. [R]*



*Dialogue is important. And the media have a role to play. For example, US media have the expertise and experience and can help media in other countries be sophisticated and questioning watchdogs of democracy. [D]*

A few respondents noted that the perceived US arrogance is real. They argued that to get past the negative image, we have to actually listen with respect, acknowledge other perspectives, be willing to compromise with our allies, and demonstrate that we will use our power for the greater good (and not for our self-interest).

*Our reputation is problematic. We're still the most powerful and influential nation, but because of our unilateral actions over the past few years we are not seen as a force for good and stability. Instead we are feared as a threat. People need to know that we will use our force for the benefit of everyone but they don't think that right now. This is a huge problem. ... Our reputation is very important for building liking and trust, which is crucial for getting countries to work cooperatively. [D]*

*The opinion is mixed. A lot of people joined and sympathized with the US after 9/11. But there's also a lot of resentment because we don't appreciate and acknowledge all the benefits we have. Other countries take that as an insult. Anti-American sentiment is based on our arrogance and our lack of regard for the have-nots of the world. But a lot of (Congressional) offices just believe the first part; they don't see the resentment. [D]*

*It is not a PR problem, although PR is part of the solution. But basically, we need to listen better and respond to other countries' needs and concerns in our actions. Right now, our actions say to others that we don't care what they think. We talk with them but after we've already made up our minds, either to try to change their minds or to convince ourselves we talked. We need to be prepared to change our plans and actions based on our talks with others. [D]*

Some respondents added that Congress is also uncertain about how to respond to the United States' low popularity rating abroad, and tends to leave foreign policy issues to the Administration. There is also a general sense of threat and uncertainty, so it is difficult to argue that the US should display some *noblesse oblige*. Our interviews suggest that at least some of America's leaders are uncertain of its future role and position in the world order.

*People are still adapting to the change, and it's a huge one. They are beginning to realize that we may not be "the" world leader any more, but one of many, especially as some of the emerging markets come into their own. There is also a lot of fear on the Hill as people try and make sense of all the new technical and biological threats to Americans. They feel out of their comfort zone when talking about these new threats (compared with the Cold War era threats) and want to make sure they keep Americans safe. [D]*

Overall, Congress is not overly concerned about the US' reputation. Most respondents did not think this is compromising the country's ability to pursue its national interest. They believed that as long as the US is the only superpower, it cannot be isolated by the world community. Many acknowledged that the Bush administration's lack of popularity compromises our ability to lead at international forums, but some also noted that these forums are not the only (and often not the best) way for the US to move forward to address the issues it needs to address. Some added that our foreign policy goals have changed and we may need to protect and enhance our national interests in different ways than before, for example, through smaller coalitions of the willing rather than through an international system of treaties and alliances.



*We're incapable of being isolated – our influence is everywhere. [D]*

*It's nothing new to have a hard time leading a coalition of people who disagree with us. But yes, our credibility is not where we'd like it to be. [D]*

*Some actions don't help at all, like appointing Bolton to the UN, but outside of the rise of another superpower, we will still be able to lead the world. [R]*

*The decline in our reputation does not impede our ability to pursue our national interest but does affect our ability to lead at international forums. Still, that should not be a criterion for us. Our job is to act for the needs and interests of the American people. [R]*

On the other hand, one Republican staffer expressed serious concerns about declining reputation, and some respondents said that this year Republicans are beginning to challenge the administration on foreign policy, something that was absolutely taboo in the election year. What seems to have shaken some Republicans are the prison scandal reports, which show clear disregard for the very values that we're trying to export to other countries. They see that as the biggest threat to our credibility and inconsistent with the administration's value-driven philosophy.

*Many in Congress think it's not a zero-sum game, i.e. we can wage the war on terror without damaging our reputation and credibility. [R]*

*There is concern, although it may be a little driven by partisanship. And the concern is dramatically more visible now. Although there are still legislators who are a rubber stamp for the Bush administration's foreign policy, more and more of them are asking tough questions. [D]*

*The first thing we must do is to be consistent with our messages. If we don't treat our prisoners well, we can't question others. We have to live by our standards – treat others the way we expect them to treat their people. [D]*

## **On International Cooperation**

In principle, virtually all respondents endorsed the idea of working with other nations to achieve our objectives, both because cooperative solutions work better and look better. But there were two very different points of view regarding why and how the US should collaborate with other countries.

Under one model (espoused by many Republicans), the US should clearly define its objectives, and then confer with others to seek their input and identify which nations are willing to work with the US toward those objectives. This is encapsulated in the Bush/Rumsfeld dictum: *The situation determines the coalition*. Under this model, large coalitions and alliances are generally ineffective and therefore not worth the time and effort.

*Generally speaking, the US' leadership style is to be the convener and the decision-maker; i.e., to set the agenda and invite input, but maintain final decision authority. [D]*



*We need to foster regional cooperation, e.g. have NATO type organizations for South America and Africa. Not in a global way, like Doha and Kyoto, because those are ineffective. For example, the broader the European Union becomes, the less likely it is that it will be able to have a unified foreign policy. It's harder to get more people to agree, so global agreements and forums are not as important. If you try to get agreement on a mass scale, you're set up for failure. [R]*

The other model of cooperation, espoused by most Liberal Internationalists, sees value in more open-ended collaboration, where the objectives themselves are open to negotiation and shared objectives are developed so as to involve as many nations as possible. In this model, collaboration and relationship-building are desirable in themselves, not just as tools to achieve a specific national interest objective.

*In too many instances, it's "my way or the highway" because we don't see the intrinsic value in cooperation. We look at the UN and see the waste and the corruption; not that this provides a forum for all countries of the world to talk and hammer issues out and has actually succeeded in reducing the occurrence of wars. They worry that it took so long to work with other nations to figure out where to bomb in Bosnia but don't see the plus – that so many nations came together to fight a dictator. [D]*

The table below highlights the main differences among the two models:

Model 1	Points of Difference	Model 2
Smaller, homogenous coalitions are better because they can act more decisively and efficiently	<b>Size of the Coalition</b>	The coalition should be as inclusive as possible
Convener and decision-maker	<b>Role of the US</b>	Participant and facilitator
To solve a problem identified by the US, in a way that meets the United States' specifications	<b>Purpose</b>	To develop a shared perspective on the problem and identify solutions that meet the needs of all members
Seeking input is important, but building consensus is not	<b>Process</b>	Discussion and consensus around some common ground is important, sometimes more so than getting everyone to commit to a specific course of action

It follows from these two models that the word "cooperation" may mean very different things to different Members.

*There seems to be a partisan divide. The Democrats tend to favor shared agenda-setting, and sometimes this works against them because the process is more cumbersome. Republicans don't work that way – they sort of follow the "get input but make decisions yourself" style. [D]*

Respondents' opinions of how well the US is cooperating with other countries seem to depend upon what model of cooperation they espouse. Those who subscribe to the first model believe



that the US is reaching out and trying to form appropriate alliances to accomplish its foreign policy objectives, although most acknowledged that it could do a better job at engaging the world community in Iraq. One respondent specifically cited Iraq as an anomaly and noted that the administration's policy with regard to North Korea, Iran, Sudan and most humanitarian issues demonstrates a reasonably collaborative stance.

*A balance has been struck pretty well between cooperating and acting unilaterally. As the President and Secretary Rumsfeld keep saying, the situation determines the coalition. In Afghanistan we have a wide coalition; in Iraq, not so much. [R]*

*Yes, we have balanced this well. Iraq is an anomaly, but in most other foreign policy issues this administration has engaged the right players. For example, look at the six-party talks on North Korea, working with the EU on Iran, and their commitment to the G8 and humanitarian causes. [R]*

For others who subscribe to the latter perspective (Model 2), the current administration's policies are too unilateral and threaten to destroy the fabric of international cooperation.

*Multilaterals are very important because they bring us together to send the right signals and establish shared purpose and responsibility. We always have the option to pick our battles – let's say an individual soldier does get into trouble with the ICC, we can always fight it then, but we don't need to start with a negative attitude. [D]*

*The scales are tipped too far toward unilateral decisions. Taking into account other people's perspectives and views has to be critical for all our decisions. [D]*

*The scales are tipped too much toward unilateralism. We're missing opportunities to work with others, e.g. on global warming, land mine treaty, test ban treaty, etc. Even if we're not party to these treaties, there's a lot of room to work with other countries on these issues and we're passing up all those opportunities. [D]*

## Has the World Changed?

Responses to this question were mixed. Some respondents thought that the world had changed quite dramatically in the last few years, although the factors leading to these dramatic changes may have been gradual rather than sudden. Some of the main factors mentioned were:

- The rise of fundamentalist Islam and terrorism
- Economic changes – emerging economies (and corresponding decline in US dominance)
- End of the Cold War

*Fighting the war on terror has changed everything. Terrorism did not have a strong presence in the pre 9/11 world and people pretty much thought America was untouchable. We now have to work to re-establish that sense of security. We now realize that there are people who don't agree with our values and will stop at nothing to hurt us. [R]*

The end of the Cold War, in particular, has led to a lot of uncertainty on foreign policy issues. The Cold War had its own priorities, alliances, and policies—now that those have changed, many Congresspersons are not sure what criteria and paradigms to use with regard to foreign policy. Some feel that the entire system of treaties and alliances that the US developed after WWII and through the Cold War era (NATO, UN, the US-Europe alliance) is no longer applicable. One reason



that the Neocon foreign policy has been so successful may be that it stepped into fill a gap left by the collapse of older paradigms.

*There is a lot of uncertainty and people almost miss the cold war days when you knew who your friends and allies were. We just don't have a coherent policy right now so we can't behave in a consistent, coherent manner. [R]*

*The international system of treaties and alliances worked fine during the Cold War because it helped people understand where everyone stood. Now, if you belong to an alliance, it doesn't mean you toe their line on anything, so the usefulness of these alliances has declined. You no longer need them to know where people stand. [R]*

Even those who felt that the world has not changed dramatically, acknowledged that the United States' perception of and response to the world has changed after the events of September 11, 2001. Some of the changes they mentioned are:

- Resources are now re-directed toward the war on terror and Iraq (which some of them believe are closely linked). Meanwhile most of the problems that preoccupied foreign policy analysts prior to September 11 (e.g., nuclear proliferation, Iran, AIDS, poverty, etc.) still remain unresolved.
- The American public now feels more invested in foreign policy because people feel that world events directly affect their jobs and their lives. Ordinary Americans are thinking about international issues more than they did before.
- Neocons have come to the fore and they tend to see the world more starkly in terms of good and evil. The pragmatists are on the defensive.

*The threat of terrorism had been building for a while and we got many messages, but we didn't take it seriously enough. When the terrorists struck on 9/11, all of a sudden the world took notice because the giant had been given a bloody nose. ... The war on terror became the focal point of our foreign policy and our policy drove the world's agenda. We realized that if you don't stand up to people in power, they walk all over you. [D]*

*Yes the world has changed since 9/11 because we are now focused on the war on terror. But most of the older problems are still there – North Korea, Iran, AIDS and poverty. The immediate focus has shifted to the war on terror, as it should for now, but we can't afford to ignore the other problems. [D]*

*The basic thing that has changed is the number and scope of suicide bombers who'll sacrifice their own lives to hurt civilians. Also the Soviet Union has collapsed and the economic dynamic of the world is changing. But the rest of our threats and concerns remain the same – poverty, energy, environment, nuclear and small arms control, etc. [D]*

*Two things have changed – (1) the threat of terrorism, and (2) jobs in the global economy. The main difference is that these foreign policy issues directly affect the lives of Americans. [R]*

Many respondents acknowledged that we do need a new coherent foreign policy framework that clearly defines our role in the world, but that hasn't happened yet. Members and staffers feel uncertain about how to deal with terrorism, and most Members are concerned about how they can best protect Americans and American interests. To some, the way to deal with this changed world is to strengthen our alliances, relationships and institutions.



*It's not the cold war any more and we need better relations with the whole world; not just with individual countries, but a sense of the world community. We need a comprehensive strategy and goals for the world and then develop a foreign policy that reflects our new objectives. And one of our goals should be about how to empower other countries in ways that bridge the divide between the haves and have-nots. [D]*

*We played an important role in setting up an international system that worked pretty well for the last so many years, and there isn't any need to throw it out now. Yes it has weaknesses, but unilateralism is not the answer to the weaknesses of multilateralism. [D]*

*We're dealing poorly with having our attention so focused on one problem while others are still there. We should realize that the War on Terror is a holding action for the US (to defend itself). We are not going to solve it; we have to just create the space for folks in the Middle East to solve it themselves. But most people don't get that point; it's definitely not a majority view. Most in Congress think we are going to resolve that issue, but the war on terror will only be over when they get no more recruits. [D]*

In this environment of uncertainty, the Neocon philosophy also provides some direction and the Bush policy (of dealing with specific issues as they arise with alliances that can be forged for that specific issue) seems to be an acceptable solution. A few respondents felt that the Bush government has crafted a balanced policy alternative that responds to the threats we face now.

*Yes after 9/11 we thought everything had to be revamped, but we have adjusted our approach and now it is effective. There was a discussion about isolation and President Bush is now trying to reconnect. Our foreign policy has progressed and adapted with the times. [R]*

*Our foreign policy is not really behind in that way, but yes it is off kilter on some issues. [D]*

## **On Effective Global Leadership**

When asked their opinion on how the US can provide effective global leadership in the current environment, respondents gave a wide variety of responses.

Some focused on meaningful collaboration with other countries and creating the space for nations to resolve regional disputes peacefully. Others felt that the US can best demonstrate leadership by promoting democracy, through soft power as far as possible and through force if necessary. Others focused on more effective use of soft power (and a better balance between soft power and force) or felt that the US must take the lead on solving global problems such as poverty and AIDS.

*The US should be engaged in any major discussion that affects us or the future of civilization. We don't need to lead them all, but we must have a seat at the table. We need to ask questions, challenge others, but develop mutually respectful relationships. [R]*

*Encourage democracy as the President is doing, to his credit. Democracy is not the perfect system and not everyone wants it, but everyone should have the*



*opportunity, and it usually helps on other fronts. We should also be addressing poverty better – once again, it isn't the cause of terrorism but it does encourage it. And we should encourage peaceful resolution in the Middle East – encourage countries to resolve their issues, and create the space for that. We keep hearing about strategic communication to make things better for the US, but that won't help. We actually have to do the right things. [D]*

*It isn't easy to fight a war by committee, but that's what we have to do. Like Wesley Clark did in Kosovo and won. Maybe what is needed most is a change in attitude and personality, because a lot of diplomacy is about charm and relationships. ... We have to approach people with the right attitude rather than with the fear that they're going to slow us down. [D]*

*We have different threats now, but the model that we came out of WWII with is still the right one, i.e. working out the threats together, and planning to rebuild Europe and Japan. The general approach was to work cooperatively to understand the threats, set priorities for what needs to be done and then address them. [D]*

*We need to combine military solutions with political and social solutions. We should not kowtow to countries that disagree with our national interest, but we do need to build on existing alliances and forge new ones. We also need to acknowledge that our own form of government is not perfect, but communicate that it is a better alternative than dictatorship. [R]*

## **Responses to Test Ideas**

Through these conversations we also specifically tested certain statements about the values and ideals that should guide US-foreign policy. In each case, the statement was presented to respondents and they were asked their opinion of it. Not all statements were tested with all respondents; these results are based on approximately 5-6 responses to each statement.

*1. The fundamental test for any element of our foreign policy should be whether it reflects shared American values like equal opportunity and basic human rights and liberties. What do you think about that?*

Respondents agreed that our foreign policy should be guided by our values and should be judged by them in the long run. But, they added, that as a practical matter, foreign policy is about balancing priorities and concerns and often short-term needs or strategic goals win out over basic values. Thus, adherence to values is not a fundamental criterion for foreign policy, but one of many criteria by which a policy is evaluated. Several staffers acknowledged that many elements of our foreign policy are inconsistent with our stated values.

*This should be the ultimate goal, but it cannot be a test for every tactic. We may do many things in the short term that deviate from this but they may get us ultimately to that goal. [D]*

*It's amazing to us how out-of-whack funding is with our stated policy. Seven times out of ten, our money is not where our mouth is. In terms of living up to our values, we're good about immediate humanitarian assistance, but once the crisis is over, we don't do a good job on this. Our stated policy is to help people help themselves, but very few of our actual, funded programs reflect this position – they*



*are celebrated (e.g. microenterprise programs), but they are a very small part of our budget. [D]*

Respondents also varied in how they understood this statement. Some understood it to apply very specifically to trade treaties and workers' rights. Others thought it applied to development assistance. Some of the more liberal/progressive respondents clarified that we should be careful about judging other countries by American values and standards. In general, though, everyone interpreted this question in light of soft power tools that the US uses to influence the behavior of other nations; no one applied this question to the United States' own behavior in international forums.

*This is very important. For example, we put trade restrictions on countries that have bad human rights records. [R]*

*I agree, but we have to be careful about being too broad with it. What makes America great is personal freedom and the equality of opportunity, including the opportunity to contribute to society. Although foreign policy issues are complex, we can try to reach for those broad goals. But it's not as important to me to promote the American way of life itself. [D]*

*It is important. We do have certain ideals regarding how the world should be and we do bring those to international negotiations. But we have to be open to the idea that others may bring a different set of values and ideals and that decisions should be made on shared values, not just American values. ... Expression of our ideals in our foreign policy is not equal to coercion that others adopt them too. [D]*

*2. Is it realistic to think that our foreign policies should be directed at creating the same opportunities for people of other countries that we value for ourselves in the US?*

Most respondents agreed with this statement, although some acknowledged that nations differ with respect to their wants, abilities and responsibilities and we should respect that. In general, however, all agreed that our foreign policies should provide incentives to create free societies.<sup>2</sup>

*Yes. We can't do it alone but we can help people do it for themselves. And it benefits us too. Generally, those who have these opportunities and live in our system are our friends. [D]*

*Yes, although this is limited by the fact that other sovereign nations have different abilities and responsibilities. But we can drive and incentivize them to take care of their people in the way that fits our world view. [R]*

*Not the "same" opportunities, but people should have the right to strive for what's important to them. We have to be careful about what we assume is universally accepted and desired. We can't impose a rigid formula for how other countries should be. [D]*

*3. A good foreign policy is one that helps create a better, safer world for everyone. What do you think of that statement?*

---

<sup>2</sup> Virtually all respondents assumed that, given the choice, people will choose the benefits of free markets and democratic governments over alternative political and economic systems. They granted that all countries may not be "ready" to implement such systems, but felt that people's natural preference is for freedom and democracy.



All respondents agreed with this test statement. However, some added that this statement is vague enough to be virtually meaningless, and that people would differ widely in what this means and how we can implement this principle.

*This has to be true. You can't isolate Americans. We can't create chaos and then be secure. [D]*

*Absolutely, but people may differ in the details of how this can be done. [R]*

4. *Some people argue that development assistance is a smart investment in making America and the rest of the world safer, because poverty and inequality breed chaos and terrorism. What do you think of that statement?*

Most respondents agreed that poverty contributes towards breeding unrest and terrorism. They also agreed that development assistance can therefore be a tool to promote stability in the world and make it a safer place. However, many respondents qualified their agreement with this point of view by adding that poverty is not the only (and perhaps not even the main) cause of terrorism, and that development assistance is just one of many tools to fight terrorism.

*Poverty increases support for fanatics, but it doesn't create the fanatics themselves. The statement is therefore incomplete; development assistance is part of the solution but not all of it. [D]*

*I agree completely, with one caveat. Poverty greatly exacerbates instability and violence, but it isn't the only cause. So we should not just focus on poverty alleviation as a solution. There are ideological threats from fascism, extremism, etc. Even if there were no poverty in the world, we'd still occasionally have some global security threats to deal with. [D]*

Those who supported increasing development assistance noted that, in practice, development assistance often loses out to other concerns. One person added that most Members of Congress believe that their constituents want them to spend its money on solving domestic problems and so are reluctant to be seen as champions for overseas development assistance.

*Probably many people agree with this in principle, but when the rubber hits the road, you allocate money in favor of other principles and objectives. Our total development aid was just a fraction of what we spent in Iraq. [D]*

*There is not much support for this view. Many members reflect their constituents' view that America should spend all its money solving its own problems. [R]*

*A lot of offices see this differently. Some think development aid is a good foreign policy investment but not as good as some others. Others think that we should give aid depending on our own political interest, not need or general good. And still others think we should focus all our resources on solving our own problems and not get involved with others' problems. [D]*

To a couple of respondents, how development assistance is apportioned was more important than the amount of development assistance. These respondents felt that development assistance and favorable trade terms can be important tools if used to reward or promote certain policies. They felt that "throwing money at problems" does not do a whole lot of good. A couple of respondents also mentioned that development assistance is good public relations and enhances the US' reputation and soft power.



*It doesn't do any good to just throw money at problems, but we can work wisely to create opportunities for people. [D]*

*Policies that help and are seen as helping others make America safer. They are good from the humanitarian and the PR perspective. [R]*

*5. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century needs leadership based on bringing people together for the common good in a principled way, rather than on military and economic clout.*

Respondents agreed with this statement in principle, but added that it is too idealistic. Most believed that soft power can and should be used more effectively, but maintained that it has no legs without military force to back it up. Also, national interest is always a concern and cannot be dissociated from any foreign policy issue.

*It's about balance. Sometimes it is necessary to use military clout, but at the same time we need to look at the human rights issues. But we have to make sure our national security interests are protected. [R]*

*I agree in principle, but it is hard to get away from the raw vital interest/national security point of view. It's hard to keep the rudder pointed in that direction. [D]*

*I'm a traditionalist. It sounds good for people to come together and agree, but it takes military and economic power to actually make things happen. So, I believe that that has to be the basis of our leadership – that's the way it is, not necessarily how it should be, but it is. [D]*

*True, and an attractive proposition, but it is impossible to take power out of the equation. That's the way the world works on a micro and a global level. Power is real. The international system we built did not deny power differentials – it acknowledged them and tried to develop consensus within that framework. ... It is very difficult for a nation that has so much economic, military and cultural power to say "we won't use it" or "it doesn't matter." It's like going to the negotiating table with your hands tied behind your back. The Republican majority doesn't even think it's important to bring people together if we can get our way without doing that. [D]*

*As Ben Franklin said, leadership is about getting people to do what they don't want to do and getting them to like it. So, yes, I would agree with the importance of soft diplomacy. But any soft diplomacy has to be backed by military force – i.e. it needs to always be an option on the table and people need to know that we're willing to put our most valuable resource – our people – behind our words. Yes, charm and coercive diplomacy have their place, but although the types of wars will change, military might will always play a role. And that's why we need to keep our military strong. [D]*

