GLOBAL SECURITY FORUM 2021

SOFTENING SHARP DIVIDES: FOREIGN POLICY IN AN ERA OF DOMESTIC DIVISION

AUTHORS
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Emily Harding
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A Report of the CSIS International Security Program

CSIS | CENTER FOR STRATEGIC & INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
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Foreword

The past two years have seen extraordinary upheaval in American society. We have had to rethink so much that is fundamental to our lives: how we work, where we find reliable information, and how we understand the way race and gender shape our perceptions of the world. Rather than unite in the face of this uncertainty and change, we have seen our political leaders take radical positions on increasingly distant sides of the political spectrum.

Meanwhile, storms gather on the horizon. We face an era of great power competition, made more complex by modes of ambiguous warfare. China is building the foundations to challenge the global order to make space for its growing ambitions. Russia’s leader seeks to undermine Europe and the transatlantic alliance, utilizing mis- and disinformation to amplify tensions in democracies. At the same time, a familiar national consensus appears to be rapidly eroding. The legitimacy of fundamental governmental and non-governmental institutions is being challenged. Social media algorithms feed outrage and reinforce a worrying tribalism.

The depth of these entrenchments, and their consequences for America’s role in the world, is the subject of this report. This research comes at a critical time. Our divisions at home have led to a breakdown in elements of governing that were once assumed as part of a functioning democracy, from confirming ambassadors to funding the government to the pro forma procedure of certifying a presidential election. As these normal procedures are warped by partisanship, experts on democratic backsliding are sounding alarms not about far-flung conflicts, but about our backyards.

The implications are consequential. As the makers of foreign policy grapple with a myriad of challenges abroad—an assertive China, a belligerent Russia, an intractable stand-off with Iran, and a pugnacious and petulant North Korea—they must also communicate a clear vision and strategy to American citizens. They must take the time and effort to explain to the American electorate why a stable, rules-based international order is good for their security and their pocketbooks, and they must convey the very real and urgent threats to that order.

Leadership is not needed to sell popular decisions. Rather, it is put to the test in developing and explaining correct but unpopular choices to a reluctant citizenry. The necessity of a course of action may only be apparent to those sitting in the situation room, and not to those sitting behind a commentator’s desk.

It was once the norm that politics stopped at the water’s edge. That is no longer the case. The authors of this report call for respecting the diversity of views from across the spectrum while creating unity of purpose to meet today’s challenges. We found much common ground in our research—the American public and foreign policy experts alike are eager to engage, lead, and do good—even when the question of how to engage divides us. Now is the time to build on what unites us. The challenges are sufficiently great to require everyone’s help and commitment.

JOHN HAMRE
President & CEO, Langone Chair in American Leadership, CSIS
Executive Summary

This report examines the state of U.S. domestic divides, discusses their influence on foreign policymaking, and explores several scenarios where the intersection of a foreign policy crisis and a skeptical public is put to the test. It shows that domestic divides extend beyond partisan politics and that U.S. citizens see foreign policy through lenses that differ greatly depending on socio-economic status, age, rural versus urban location, and race. It also shows that there is nonetheless plenty of common ground among Americans when it comes to foreign policy, especially when considering short-term responses to crises, and among foreign policy professionals from across the political spectrum.

Today, no single foreign policy issue unites or divides Americans as the 9/11 attacks or the Vietnam War once did. Instead, domestic divisions have created an opportunity for U.S. adversaries. China has used its own brand of “whataboutism” to claim its “democracy” is just as good as the U.S. version. Russia has used the last three election cycles to attempt to deepen rifts within U.S. society. Both assess that a weakened, inwardly focused United States is less likely to engage on the world stage. After a half-century of U.S. leadership, both hope that inward bent could mean weakened alliances, a gutted rules-based international order, and an unwillingness to push back on Chinese economic dominance or Russian expansionism.

A dirge for U.S. leadership is likely premature, however, for Americans are united in at least one opinion: the United States should lead. A February 2021 Pew Research Center survey showed that 87 percent of Americans think it is important for the United States to be respected abroad. CSIS’s own public survey showed similarly strong bipartisan support for U.S. global engagement, including 56 percent of people identifying as “Extremely Liberal/Progressive” and 57 percent of those identifying as “Extremely Conservative.”
Digging deeper into these polls, Americans disagree on how to lead and the appropriate priorities of that leadership. For example, divides exist on whether a robust military advantage is a necessary component of leading: 68 percent of Republicans say yes, but only 30 percent of Democrats agree. Similarly, a large majority of Republicans but a minority of Democrats believe the United States should attempt to limit the power and influence of China, even though an overall bipartisan majority supports defending Taiwan against Chinese interference. Republican and Democratic respondents also disagree on which issues are the top priorities. The September 2020 Chicago Council survey demonstrated few areas of priority overlap: whereas Democrats consider Covid-19, climate change, and racial inequality to be top threats, Republicans prioritize China, terrorism, and immigration.

In addition to taking a hard look at divisions and unity on foreign policy, this report seeks to understand to what extent these divisions do and should affect foreign policy decisionmaking. The U.S. public has limited channels to exert day-to-day control over policy, yet today’s engaged citizen still has an unprecedented set of opportunities to express opinions. Social media gives any person a voice, and algorithms designed to grab attention highlight the most extreme versions of those opinions. Politicians, who always have an eye on the next election cycle, are keenly aware of their constituencies’ views.

The balance, then, for elected leaders is between faithfully executing on the solemn duty to represent the will of the people and making unpopular decisions that are nonetheless necessary for the safety of the nation. Once that difficult decision is made, they must also ask the American people for support, even sacrifice, to accomplish the requirement to provide for the common defense.

In order to explore how policymakers might go about both making that decision and asking the U.S. public for support, U.S. foreign policy professionals participated in hypothetical future scenarios about Taiwan, an immigration crisis on the southern border, and a blockade on a major shipping route near the Suez Canal. The discussions centered on two questions. First, could experts across the political spectrum agree on a recommended course of action during a foreign policy crisis? Second, how would those experts convey to the American public the necessity of the planned steps? These scenario exercises, along with historical research and expert discussions, answered the question about how domestic divides might constrain freedom of movement for policymakers in defining the U.S. role in the world.

The balance, then, for elected leaders is between faithfully executing on the solemn duty to represent the will of the people and making unpopular decisions that are nonetheless necessary for the safety of the nation.
Report Structure and Methodology

This report takes a mixed-method approach, combining existing and new quantitative and qualitative data sets with the findings of scenario-based workshops. It contrasts expert perspectives with broader public opinion. Analysis of unique public survey data in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 brings today’s domestic divides into stark relief and presents policy implications on why it is so important to soften them.

The report relies on the expertise of many, starting with a politically, geographically, and racially diverse group of in person and virtual workshop participants (Appendix A) who, in early November 2021, grappled with fictional but realistic future crisis scenarios (Appendix B). Expert participants assessed policy options available to the U.S. president and evaluated the constraints presented by divided public opinion on the utilization of those options.

Participating experts were also given a survey (Appendix C) to gauge their opinions outside of the workshops. After the workshops, similar questions were then posed to a politically diverse randomized online public audience of over 2,000 adults (Appendix D), which provided further depth and nuance to the analysis.

Chapter 1 details key moments in post-war U.S. foreign policy to contextualize today’s domestic divides, which then are fully presented in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 presents findings from the workshops on future scenarios. Finally, Chapter 4 offers greater detail on policy implications, which are summarized here.

Policy Implications

Findings fell into three broad categories: the state of domestic divides; making foreign policy, given those divides; and efforts to “soften” the divides.

Regarding the state of domestic divides, in some ways the findings bucked conventional wisdom:

- **Americans are not isolationists.** Majorities in both the survey of workshop participants and the public survey said the United States should be more involved in the world or that engagement levels should stay the same.

- **Partisan identification matters, but not as much as expected.** Self-identification along the political spectrum was less important than other factors.

- **The public is more divided than the experts.** While only 2 percent of workshop participants self-identified with the extreme ends of the political spectrum, 41 percent of public respondents identified as such. During workshop discussions, the experts acknowledged that more extreme positions among the public can sometimes drive debate. They discussed the importance of understanding the basis for these views and addressing a wide range of concerns in communicating with the U.S. public.

On making foreign policy in an era of domestic divides, experts often found their scope of action constrained because of concerns over domestic opinion, in particular on military entanglements and operating without the support of allies. Findings include:

- **Leaders must incorporate domestic considerations into U.S. foreign policymaking.** Of workshop participants, 44 percent stated that public opinion was the biggest barrier to achieving bipartisan consensus on any particular course of action.
• **Policymaker perceptions on what the public would endorse sometimes eliminated courses of action that otherwise might have been valuable options.** At these points of divergence, participants were left assessing how much public opinion matters, whether achieving bipartisanship was worth the corresponding constraints on action, and what to do in the absence of both public endorsement and bipartisan agreement. This is particularly important because **experts showed more risk tolerance than the public,** especially when it came to the use of military action in protecting allies and U.S. national interests.

• **Public fear of longer-term foreign military entanglement is real and constraining.** Experts were slightly more inclined to favor security options than the public in responding to foreign policy crises (42 percent to 35 percent, respectively), but fear of escalation was evident in public reticence to choose longer-term security options.

On softening sharp divides, experts acknowledged that **the reason for action must be clear and well-articulated,** though most were not optimistic that they could achieve any consensus among the public, short of a clear and pressing threat to the United States. However, some themes emerged on ways to convey the need for action to the American people:

• **Short-term consensus is achievable in the face of a crisis,** though sharp divides become more apparent in the longer term. **Friends and allies matter** broadly in foreign policy crises but can also help in making the case for action to the American public.

• **Debates should be grounded in areas of consensus, wherever they exist.** Policymakers should start by highlighting the areas of agreement and shared interests, such as the value of U.S. engagement in the world and the assistance provided to allies and partners.

• **Unpopular decisions will be necessary, but how they are communicated is important.** When an unpopular decision is necessary, policymakers should present the need for the course of action, acknowledge divergent opinions, and clearly state the goals of the action. Even in the absence of public support, U.S. foreign policymakers can shape the public narrative.

There is little doubt that deep divides exist in the United States today. However, this report shows that there is also significant common ground in foreign policy, especially in the immediate aftermath of a crisis and on the principle, still widely held, that the United States should be actively engaged on the world stage. U.S. foreign policymakers would be wise to understand and appreciate these divides—deciding when to be influenced by them, when to try to influence them, and when to act despite them.
As the old political adage goes, foreign policy does not win elections, though it can certainly lose them. In other words, while foreign policy is rarely a top voting issue, its effective management has always been important, especially if things go wrong. Exit polls routinely show voters ranking foreign policy issues below other issues (e.g., the economy), but an increasingly connected electorate forms rapid opinions on a wide range of issues, informed (and sometimes misinformed) by social media. Even though voters may not necessarily vote based on foreign policy, they still have opinions, and those opinions can have an impact on their overall confidence in government. A characteristic of liberal democracy is the empowerment of citizens to scrutinize and make demands of government, and such demands have never stopped at the water’s edge. In an era of pandemics, climate change, and supply chain disruptions, the separation of foreign and domestic issues is not always readily apparent.

Public perception of the appropriate role for the United States on the global stage has undergone numerous—some would argue continuous—transformations in the postwar era. Though Americans hoping to avoid future conflicts largely welcomed the creation of a U.S.-led international system in the wake of World War II, public opinion eventually divided into new—and not always anticipated—camps during the Cold War. Vietnam brought a foreign war onto living room television sets, while U.S. involvement in the Balkans heralded a new era of public opinion-influenced humanitarian interventionism. The fluctuating views on the post-9/11 wars then paved the way for today’s sharp divides over everything from the end of those wars to the execution of geostrategic competition with China and Iran to the management of transnational issues such as irregular migration.
The Evolution of U.S. Public Perceptions of Foreign Policy

The Cold War ends without direct military confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, followed by a period of increased economic assistance and a decreased focus on maintaining Cold War era defense budgets. The Gulf War demonstrates continued post-Vietnam reluctance to large-scale U.S. military intervention, even after the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. The Russian War enters prime time, leading to defeat in the eyes of many in the U.S. public, further solidifying opposition to the war. The Tet Offensive leads to the deaths of 19 U.S. soldiers and further wariness of intervention among the U.S. public. "America First" approach capitalizes on perceived "flag" effect and soaring patriotism to rally around the United States, resulting in a “rally around the flag” effect and soaring approval ratings for the U.S. president, an increased impact of the Iraq War on other foreign policy goals, and growing bipartisan skepticism of the potential of U.S. global leadership.

The Trump administration’s “America First” approach capitalizes on perceived domestic divides to challenge long-standing norms of U.S. foreign policy, including the merits of alliances and the importance of international institutions.

The Obama administration begins a substantive drawdown of U.S. troops from Iraq after signing the U.S.-Iraq Status of Forces Agreement in 2008 with the Iraqi government. The Trump administration’s “America First” approach capitalizes on perceived domestic divides to challenge long-standing norms of U.S. foreign policy, including the merits of alliances and the importance of international institutions.

The Biden administration offers a return to international engagement but faces immediate headwinds. While an end to the war in Afghanistan had broad public support, the fall of Kabul leads to expert criticism and a broader public reassessment of the merits and potential of active U.S. military intervention.

The organization of this report chronicles the ways in which U.S. foreign policy has evolved over time, tracking the ways in which public opinion has changed in response to these events. The report concludes with a discussion of the contemporary state of U.S. foreign policy and the challenges that lie ahead.

In an era of pandemics, climate change, and supply chain disruptions, the separation of foreign and domestic issues is not always readily apparent.

Though the average voter or policymaker may not remember the various points at which public opinion influenced foreign policy, it is clear that a reassessment of the appropriate international role of the United States is occurring once again. This chapter provides a brief history of divisions over foreign policy and provides valuable background for how today’s divides have become sharper, more visible, and more critical to address before the next inevitable crisis. While not an exhaustive list, the timeline presents key moments at which public perceptions influenced U.S. foreign policy.

Order Out of Chaos: U.S. Postwar Leadership

The end of World War II signaled the rise of the United States as a global superpower. For a time, it also cemented internationalism as the dominant force behind U.S. foreign policy. Internationalism during this period was guided by values such as globalization, anticommunism, containment and deterrence, military strength, and interventionism. In Understanding the Current International Order, Michael Mazarr et al. argue that the U.S. postwar liberal order was rooted in increased trade that contributed to liberalized economies around the world, deepened economic interdependence, and a global security infrastructure that has been used to deter conflicts and limit the use of force. The United Nations, NATO, and the so-called Bretton Woods Institutions promoted international cooperation and provided fora for the peaceful resolution of conflicts; together with the Marshall Plan, they also helped world economies rebuild after a world war. Though many of these efforts were initially controversial and required hard negotiations in the U.S. Congress, these institutions have greatly benefited U.S. interests in the years since. Ultimately, the American public would come to see the creation of this so-called liberal international order positively, especially when it positioned the United States as an anti-communist promoter of peace and democracy. Throughout the postwar and early Cold War periods, U.S. policymakers were afforded broad latitude and public trust in the conduct of foreign policy, which saw limited domestic political consequences.

Vietnam: War Enters Prime Time

This latitude and trust began to erode shortly after the onset of conflict with communist forces in Vietnam. Initially, U.S. public opinion supported intervention in Southeast Asia; this was bolstered by the alleged act of aggression against U.S. naval vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin in mid-1964, which seemed to confirm the “domino theory” developed by the Republican Eisenhower administration and reaffirmed by the Democratic Kennedy and Johnson administrations. However, public support began to shift as U.S. involvement in Vietnam dragged on and reports on the increasing costs of war—both in terms of lives lost and of money spent—became a mainstay in newspapers across the country. But it was not until video cameras arrived that public opinion decreased rapidly, with video news activating public engagement and opinion in new ways. For the first time, a U.S. audience regularly consumed imagery of airplanes dropping bombs, troops in active combat, and other hard realities of combat in
full moving picture format. By 1966, opposition to the Vietnam War emerged in growing strength among U.S. public opinion polls, and the perceived cost of the war coincided with a 28 percent fall in President Johnson’s approval rating. Anti-war groups proliferated, and public protests became a norm of everyday life, intertwining with activism on civil rights and other movements. Republican candidate Richard Nixon ultimately secured the next presidency in part based on his promise to end the war in Vietnam; however, he was unable to do so quickly, and by 1971, more than 71 percent of the surveyed public agreed “that the United States had made a mistake.” Thanks in large part to prime-time television imagery, the way the public follows U.S. foreign policy would never be the same.

Post-Vietnam: National Interest Dominates

The Vietnam War had another significant impact on public perception of U.S. global engagement: though the idea of national interest predated Vietnam, defeat in that war entrenched American national interest as a necessary precursor to intervention—particularly military intervention—at least until the 1990s. Among other things, this showed that the era of broad public latitude afforded to U.S. policymakers was over and that there would be significant domestic political consequences for unpopular foreign policies. It demonstrated that foreign policy was no longer apolitical; in fact, it had become the front lines of partisan and ideological battles. “No more Vietnam” sentiments were met with arguments that the war could have been won if only there had been greater public support. Most significantly, both sides of the emerging domestic divides on foreign policy placed greater significance on national interests—which were not always made clear by U.S. officials during the war—for years to come after the fall of Saigon. For example, efforts by the Reagan administration to garner public support for broad intervention in Soviet Union-backed Nicaragua failed, resulting in more limited and covert assistance to the Contras. In what would become known as the Iran-Contra affair, the lack of public and congressional support for aiding the Contras was coupled with a mismanaged crisis in Iran. Public opinion constrained President Reagan’s ability to act, while the conduct of foreign policy created significant domestic problems for his administration.

Bosnia: The Age of (Eventual) Multilateral Intervention

By the mid-1990s, a booming economy, the fall of the Soviet Union, decolonization across Africa, and a seemingly unstoppable global march toward democracy had emboldened U.S. policymakers. The Clinton administration initially inherited its predecessors’ reluctance to intervene, influenced by public fallout from U.S. soldier deaths in Somalia in 1993. Clinton had also been unwilling to intervene to stop conflict in Rwanda despite overwhelming evidence of genocide. But by 1994, coverage of the Rwandan genocide and growing focus on similar atrocities happening in Bosnia and Herzegovina fueled a public push for action. Though debates existed about whether the United States should be the “world police,” ultimately criticisms of U.S. inaction began dominating news coverage and damaging the president’s approval ratings. President Clinton was paying attention and soon began to urge multilateral action.

The Bosnia case shows that the public definition of what constitutes national interests was beginning to shift; importantly, that shift was toward more coordinated actions with allies and through multilateral bodies. In 1995, the first coherent U.S. strategy to address the conflict in Bosnia was predicated on diplomatic cooperation, multilateral military action via NATO, and a commitment to a
UN peacekeeping plan. The resulting March 1996 Dayton Peace Accords brought an end to a four-year conflict and demonstrated that U.S.-led multilateral intervention, though delayed, could have a quick and positive impact on peace. The Dayton Accords benefited from significant bipartisan support, helping bridge post-Vietnam public ambivalence to foreign policy actions.

Post-9/11: The Power of a National Security Narrative

If post-Vietnam ambivalence remained after Bosnia, it was almost completely wiped out after terrorists attacked the United States on September 11, 2001. The broad desire to “rally around the flag” and hold those responsible accountable was undoubtedly buoyed by the demonstrated ability to use multilateral and military strength to achieve humanitarian outcomes, though the desire for retribution and preemption of future threats would likely have been there regardless after an attack on the homeland. By mid-September 2001, 77 percent of the U.S. public supported military response in retaliation against those responsible for the attacks, even if it meant that “U.S. armed forces might suffer thousands of casualties.” Republican president George W. Bush’s job approval rating surged to 90 percent, marking the highest presidential approval rating in U.S. history. The 2001 authorization to use military force passed Congress with nearly unanimous support: 98 to 0 in the Senate and 420 to 1 in the House, solidifying the powers of the administration to conduct foreign operations as it saw fit. Though the bipartisan and public support was originally for intervention in Afghanistan, this perceived broadened mandate would come to include places such as Iraq that even at the time had only a tenuous (and ultimately disproven) connection to the 9/11 attacks. Almost overnight, the prevailing national security narrative became what would eventually be called the “Freedom Agenda,” predicated on the idea that the United States should pursue a “forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East.” Similarly, the “war on terror” laid the foundation for broad executive powers in conducting—and messaging about—foreign policy.

However, much like in Vietnam, public opinion proved to be a fickle thing. Despite initial support—72 percent of Americans supported the decision to go to war in Iraq—public support dried up as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq dragged on long after their initial objectives were achieved, as more soldiers died or were severely wounded, and as evidence emerged that the incursion in Iraq was predicated on misleading information. Democrats reclaimed the House of Representatives in the 2006 midterms, with exit polls showing that 57 percent of voters disapproved of the war in Iraq. By late 2008, President Bush’s job approval rating dropped into the 20s, compounded by a financial crisis.

Democratic candidate Barack Obama’s victory in the presidential election of 2008 is an obvious outcome, but there were subtler impacts of this lack of public support for the Bush administration’s foreign policy. For example, in 2007, the administration decided to declassify and publicly release the key judgments from the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE): Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities. The NIE stated that “We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program,” which marked a departure from earlier assessments that Iran was determined to build a bomb. Steven Hadley, Bush’s national security adviser at the time, later wrote that “the release of the NIE judgments seriously set back Bush administration efforts during 2008 to convince the international community to impose further sanctions on Iran.” Greg Schulte, former U.S. ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), said: “I never want to see something like the 2007 NIE again. Nothing did more to set back my job [at the IAEA] in terms of how key judgments were drafted.” However, Bush administration officials still decided to release the NIE—despite it hindering
the administration’s Iran policy—believing it preferable to allegations that the new intelligence was covered up or politicized. In this decision, they were influenced heavily by fallout from mistakes and subsequent investigations in Iraq regarding weapons of mass destruction.31

The Obama administration’s foreign policy approach reflected a general reluctance to send U.S. forces overseas and a preference for drawing down on existing commitments, in large part as a reaction to public views on Iraq and Afghanistan. For example, after hesitating to engage in the conflict in Syria in 2011, the administration ultimately sent U.S. special forces to engage in a mission with goals strictly tailored to the counterterrorism mission. By the time Afghanistan fell back into Taliban hands almost exactly 20 years after 9/11, the U.S. public was firmly critical of efforts in the region and more generally wary of U.S. military intervention, as the next chapter shows. Although terrorism has continued to rank as a high policy priority in the U.S. public perception, the impact of the indeterminate military interventions of the “war on terror” in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and elsewhere would coincide with diminished public confidence in the United States’ responsibility to guarantee global peace and prosperity.32 By the end of 2021, the pendulum was swinging back to the post-Vietnam, pre-Bosnia concerns over national interest and U.S. global leadership.
The Present

Sharp Divides at Home Continue to Influence Policy Abroad

The stories of postwar multilateralism and U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq do not offer a complete picture of when and how the public interest has influenced U.S. foreign policy. However, they do offer useful insights and examples. The willingness of the public to defer to foreign policymakers has ebbed (post-Vietnam, post-Iraq) and flowed (post-World War II, post-Bosnia, and post-9/11), at times even over the course of a single conflict (Vietnam, Iraq). Innovations such as televised war reporting have had a profound impact on the ability of policymakers to do as they please (Vietnam) and in pushing them to act (Bosnia). Circumstances back home, such as civil unrest and protests in the 1960s and 1970s and a strong economy in the 1990s, influenced actions abroad.

After the broader tour through history in the previous chapter, this chapter dives into more granular data, quantifying domestic divides as they exist today. Together, these two chapters provide the foundation for the crisis scenario-based takeaways and policy implications in the final two chapters.

Today’s Domestic Divides

February 2021 data from the Pew Research Center shows that 87 percent of U.S. citizens think it is very or somewhat important for the United States to be respected abroad. These findings are corroborated by a September 2020 Chicago Council survey that found that, even in the throes of a global pandemic, “Americans continue to reject retreat from the world.” In CSIS’s own public survey, U.S. global engagement had strong support from 56 percent of people identifying as “Extremely Liberal/Progressive” and 57 percent of those identifying as “Extremely Conservative” (these and other results can be found in Chapter 4 and Appendix D). As foreign policymakers face daunting challenges, from a pandemic and climate change to a rising China and a recalcitrant Russia, they do so with public buy-in
for U.S. involvement at a high level. But they must also do so at a point when innovations such as the 24-hour news cycle and social media make consistent messaging difficult and when domestic divides over race, the economy, education, and other issues in the United States dominate those information platforms. It is thus unsurprising that domestic divides become sharper the more specific the issues get.

The February 2021 Pew survey also showed that while 68 percent of Republicans felt that maintaining a military advantage is a top priority, only 30 percent of Democrats agreed. A similar partisan gap (63 percent of Republicans, 36 percent Democrats) existed in that survey with regards to limiting the power and influence of China; however, a more recent Chicago Council survey from August 2021 showed that while political orientation may influence the preferred method of managing China, overall bipartisan public support for defending Taiwan against Chinese interference has hit an all-time high of 52 percent.35

One of the widest gaps exists on immigration, with 64 percent of Republicans in the February 2021 Pew survey listing the reduction of illegal immigration as a top priority versus only 16 percent of Democrats.36 Similarly, the September 2020 Chicago Council survey demonstrated few areas of priority overlap: whereas Democrats consider Covid-19, climate change, and racial inequality to be top threats, Republicans prioritize China, terrorism, and immigration.37

**Divides Are Not Politically Binary**

The Republican and Democratic parties are far from homogenous monoliths. A recent report from the Pew Research Center assessing July 2021 survey data shows that the state of domestic divisions is far deeper than binary partisan coalitions. The report identifies nine distinct ways that people self-identify, independent of and apart from traditional partisan alignment: Faith and Flag Conservatives; Committed Conservatives; Populist Right; Ambivalent Right; Stressed Sideliners; Outsider Left; Democratic Mainstays; Establishment Liberals; and Progressive Left.38 Characterized by distinct views on individual issues, these identities illustrate that stark differences exist even within traditional political coalitions. This allows us to understand behavior that may seem incongruous at first glance, for example, why some Republicans support military intervention while others do not and why some Democrats support increased trade barriers while others support free trade policies.

Divergent public views are not held in a foreign policy vacuum. A major lens through which U.S. citizens view foreign policy is their own domestic economic situation. Economic growth is always somewhat uneven, but the level of income inequality in the United States is approaching the “extreme level that prevailed prior to the Great Depression.”39 This manifests most acutely in rural versus urban communities in the United States, with the former increasingly feeling left behind as young people and women seek opportunities outside their hometowns.40 Reliable sources of livable income are becoming scarcer as people previously working in disappearing industries are unable to integrate into a transforming and more knowledge-based economy. Rural digital infrastructure lags behind urban areas, a concern that has been highlighted by Covid-19 lockdowns and pivots to virtual work and learning elsewhere that were inaccessible to those in more underserved (often rural) areas.
Domestic divides become sharper the more specific the issues get.

Race is an additional and related lens through which foreign policy is considered. The protests that followed George Floyd’s murder in the summer of 2020 brought long-simmering racial issues to the forefront of the American psyche. Despite some progress in recent decades, Black Americans in particular have long dealt with systemic inequities that result in greater deaths and fewer economic opportunities. For example, “There is a consistent gap in earnings between black [sic] or African American men and white men.” Though it has narrowed in recent years, the gap in life expectancy between Black and white Americans is still 3.6 years. These inequities are not only highlighted by geostrategic competitors, but they can also undermine the overall impact of U.S. foreign policies.

An additional divide can exist between foreign policy “experts” and the general public, though the data here is mixed. According to one recent report by the Eurasia Group Foundation (EGF), while 47 percent of experts express a worldview of American leadership as “indispensable” to global stability, peace, and prosperity, only 10 percent of bipartisan public opinion survey respondents shared this view. In that study, 44 percent of those surveyed reflected an “independent” view of U.S. global leadership, which prioritizes addressing domestic challenges over international leadership. On several important issues discussed in the following two chapters, CSIS’s public survey results diverge from the expert opinions of scenario-based workshop participants.

One thing is clear from the data analyzed for this report: national interest is clearly back in a way not seen since the aftermath of the Vietnam War. As such, a failure to effectively anchor U.S. foreign policy in the national interest—or, perhaps more importantly, to be seen as having effectively done so—can undermine public trust and, by extension, impose significant costs. According to another Pew Research Center report from May 2021, no more than one-third of U.S. citizens across partisan lines has expressed trust in government at any point in the past decade. The fluctuation of government confidence among Republicans and Democrats has coincided positively with short-term foreign policy responses to national security crises and negatively as conflicts have progressed, with an overall downward trend leading to a historically low bipartisan trust in government in 2021.

This lack of trust in government not only makes foreign policy decisions less effective, it also creates opportunities for geostrategic rivals looking to exploit domestic divides. For example, countries such as China have taken advantage of state-sanctioned social media accounts to aggressively promote national interests and to conduct targeted disinformation campaigns that amplify and deepen divisions in the United States, oftentimes by targeting both sides of a divisive issue at the same time. Russia has a long history of exploiting divisions in the United States, including during the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections.

The historical examples in the previous chapter show some of the ways that public opinion has influenced U.S. foreign policy since World War II. The idea that public opinion matters in foreign policy is not new or novel. Nevertheless, the challenge of reconciling shifting public opinion with today’s sharp domestic divides discussed in this chapter is as significant as it has ever been. Given the near universal access to information of varying quality and reliability and the ability of geostrategic rivals
to exploit domestic divides in the United States, there is a strong case to be made that the challenges facing foreign policymakers today may be even more significant than any in living memory—and that they will only become more challenging in the future.

One thing is clear from the data analyzed for this report: national interest is clearly back in a way not seen since the aftermath of the Vietnam War.
The Future

_Crisis Management amid Domestic Divides_

On November 3, 2021, CSIS convened a bipartisan group of leading foreign policy experts and stakeholders steeped in today’s domestic environment to explore whether and how political, geographic, racial, socioeconomic, and other divides constrain active U.S. engagement abroad. Scenario-based exercises challenged participants to identify desirable solutions to future national security-related crises in the context of sharply divided opinions on U.S. foreign policy. Individual and aggregate insights from the November workshops are presented in this chapter alongside a survey completed by the participants. A survey asking similar questions to a politically diverse public audience (see Appendix D), also conducted in November 2021, bolstered these findings. Details of the breakdown of survey participants’ political orientations can be found in Appendix D. The public survey findings are presented throughout this chapter when relevant to the specific scenarios and in the next chapter as they relate to the broader policy implications of the report.

The expert workshop and the public survey showed that foreign policymakers are not damned to division and discord. Consensus is possible despite domestic divides, at least in the short term. Experts and public survey respondents alike are strongly in favor of U.S. global leadership, though not military action. Ultimately, participants in the 2021 Global Security Forum were presented with tough decisions in the face of challenging crises abroad, often ones without clear alignment of national security interests and public opinion.

_The expert workshop and the public survey showed that foreign policymakers are not damned to division and discord._
The Three Scenario-Based Workshops

Both the November 3 workshops and the public survey dealt with three future scenarios, all of which are fictitious yet realistic:

**Scenario 1:** Iranian proxy forces in Yemen disrupt the flow of goods and natural resources through the Bab al-Mandeb Strait in late 2022.

**Scenario 2:** Natural disasters and political malfeasance combine to increase irregular migration flows from Central America in 2026.

**Scenario 3:** China capitalizes on an accident to extend territorial claims over Taiwan's Kinmen Islands in 2027.

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**Scenario 1: Disruption in the Bab al-Mandeb Strait (2022)**

*The language has been kept in its original form with no content edits.*

It is the winter of 2022 and conflict in Yemen between Saudi Arabia and Iran-backed Houthi militias is escalating. These Iranian proxies block the Bab al-Mandeb (BAM) Strait, using a combination of small boats, coastal defense cruise missiles, and swarming drones. Combined, this leads to a disruption in global supply chains, including the transport of liquified natural gas. Growing tensions with the Houthis lead the Saudis to conduct a high-profile airstrike in Yemen resulting in the death of three members of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and a senior Houthi leader. Iranian and Houthi leaders ascribe, without evidence, responsibility to the United States for the planning of this attack and fighting between the Saudis and Iranian-backed proxies intensifies. In the following days, several ballistic and anti-ship cruise missiles are fired from Houthi-controlled territory on a Saudi base in the Red Sea, at oil processing facilities in Saudi Arabia, and towards a U.S. Destroyer transiting the BAM. The continuing escalation of this conflict leads to a backlog of cargo ships at the Suez Canal and outside the Red Sea and economists warn of a global supply chain disruption and inflationary pressures from the overnight 20 percent jump in energy prices as oil prices trend towards $140 per barrel. Within a week, a major energy crisis hits the United States and Europe and puts pressure on prices globally. In the U.S. there is panic buying, resulting in long lines at gas stations, despite the limited impact on the U.S. oil supply. As forecasts predict a polar vortex to hit the Midwest in the coming days the President is facing increased political pressure to respond to the growing military and economic crisis.46

Workshop participants quickly noted that a disruption in the BAM Strait would create an energy and supply chain crisis that would be severe and widespread during any time of the year, but also that such a crisis would be made worse by a cold winter in the United States. Visuals of long lines at gas stations and freezing families unable to heat their homes stressed the urgency of this crisis. Given the immediacy and acuteness of the energy crisis in particular, participants agreed that there would be tremendous pressure on the U.S. Congress and administration to resolve the crisis and get rapid access to fuel. Participants proposed a dual response that is both narrow and robust, centered around diplomatic intervention and a joint naval response from the United States and its European and Asian allies to immediately open the strait to commercial traffic. Longer-term consensus solutions were tougher to find, due to a perceived reluctance by the American people to reengage in a war in the Middle East.
In the short term, experts felt that the naval package should include mine-clearing and anti-pirating ships, assuming that mines and pirating tactics were tools available to the Houthi militias. Reflagging these ships would be necessary to make them eligible for escort by the U.S. Navy. The naval package to clear the blockade would be robust in its unified, international nature but also limited in that it would focus just on opening the strait—not engaging Iran or reengaging in the Yemen war. By not engaging Iran directly, experts believed the United States and its allies would minimize the risk of a widening conflict, a significant and widely held concern. Participants agreed on the need for a multilateral naval response, but questions on the scale and length of engagement remained unresolved.

Participants sought diplomatic engagement with regional partners and with the Houthis as a fundamental part of the response. Public and private diplomatic engagement with allies is important not only to secure the necessary international naval package but also to present a united front in the face of the crisis. Participants stressed that engaging China would be important, in the hopes that Beijing would then pressure Iran to end the blockade given the importance of supply chain disruptions to its own economy; however, while a worthwhile effort, the probability of success was deemed to be low given recent animosity between the United States and China. To the extent possible, given existing sanctions and other statutory limitations on doing so, direct diplomatic engagement with the Houthis was deemed to be of vital importance to understanding their aims and motivating factors, thus allowing for a more nuanced and tailored response. Whether they desire financial assistance in the short term or international recognition in the long term, it would be up to the United States and allied governments whether and how to engage with these demands.

Accompanying these international efforts would be immense U.S. domestic pressure to resolve the crisis without entangling the United States in another longer-term armed conflict. Public messaging from the president would need to ease fears of the short-term naval and diplomatic responses potentially escalating into war. Participants highlighted the need for the president and other credible messengers to specifically articulate that this response would not be an attack on Iran, but rather a limited, multilateral response to restoring freedom of navigation in the BAM Strait to resolve global energy and supply chain issues. The focus of the messaging, then, is not on Iran but rather on the economic and energy threats from the blockade.

Although a phased approach to the challenge was discussed, participant consensus on short-term responses dissipated when considering the longer term. A particular area of divergence existed over energy (in)dependence, with participants positing that the debate would roughly fall into two camps. Some on the political left could argue that the 2022 energy crisis be used as a launching point to make a stronger shift toward renewable energy, while others, likely on the political right, would see this as an opportunity to increase domestic energy production, including by using controversial methods such as fracking. Ultimately, as the immediate crisis recedes, the temporary bridges built over a polarized population would give way to sharp domestic divides once more.
The Public Response to the BAM Scenario

Public respondents diverged significantly from workshop experts on the types of diplomatic options proposed. While 67 percent of experts were in favor of Long-Term Option 4 (“Engage European partners on forming a new task force for ensuring freedom of navigation in the Red Sea”), this was the least favored diplomatic option among public respondents, at only 23 percent. Similarly, while 60 percent of expert respondents supported Long-Term Diplomatic Option 3 (“Expand multi-lateral efforts to include coercive measures in an effort to broker a new truce in the Yemen civil war”), only 40 percent of public respondents supported this option. Of public respondents, 64 percent converged around short-term options rather than the long-term ones preferred by experts.

Scenario 2: Overlapping Crises Lead to Increased Irregular Migration Flows (2026)

The language has been kept in its original form with no content edits.

It is 2026 and there is a storm on the horizon in Central America. Since 2022 socio-economically vulnerable countries in the region have been devastated by the reoccurrence of natural disasters, conflict, and chronic instability fueled by corrupt government and the prevalence of illicit groups. Lessening remittance flows, low incomes, weak currencies and limited opportunity for migrant workers resulting from anti-immigration policies have sustained high levels of migration from Central America to the United States. The recent presidential elections in Honduras (2025) and El Salvador (2024) of candidates with known ties to illicit groups have led to a crackdown on political freedom and a rise in extortion, corruption, violence, and decreased economic activity. As a result, hundreds of thousands of people have been pushed into migration each year, with many attempting to come to the U.S. via Guatemala and Mexico. With no regular, safe, or orderly means to escape, most seek to enter the U.S. irregularly or to seek asylum. Growing restrictions in migration policies in the U.S. and Mexico have, as an unintended consequence, opened up new sources of revenue for human smugglers and traffickers. While the U.S. remains divided on border security or comprehensive immigration reform in the fall of 2026 there are indications – in social media trends, intelligence, and communications with Central American and Mexican leaders – of a likely spike in migration as the region is struggling to recover from the latest climate disasters and a new wave of civil unrest. The polarization of the American public on immigration has mounted enormous pressure on the President to respond to this crisis.47

Migration has long been a polarizing topic in the United States, and the debate over immigration policy (i.e., migration to the United States) in particular has rapidly intensified in recent years. This scenario-based workshop was not insulated from this reality: participants reached fewer points of consensus than those in the BAM-related scenario above and the Taiwan-related one below. Despite this, participants did have some agreement at the strategic level and identified policies that constituted the outer bounds of acceptability, such as the use of the military to harden the border. Deploying the military or the National Guard to the border may not even be legal and, even if it was, is ultimately not the best use of these capabilities. It is important to note that the bipartisan group of participants assumed that the U.S. administration in 2026 would either be a continuation of the
current Democratic administration or a Republican administration with more traditional approaches to national security, rather than a future Republican presidency carrying with it a significantly divergent set of viewpoints and approaches more in line with the Trump administration. Though the impact of the Trump presidency on immigration policies and narratives was discussed (e.g., the Trump administration’s “Remain in Mexico” policy, which has been continued by the Biden administration), the implications of a future Trump—or Trump-like—presidency were not debated in full.

The participants aligned behind longer-term goals and principles, namely the need to move toward a system whereby migration flows are legal, orderly, and safe. Such a system would require more robust regional responses involving U.S. neighbors and allies, but the broader debate among the group was over both how this can be achieved and who can best communicate this ideal. The question of how such a legal, orderly, and safe migration system can be achieved was largely dependent on whether the participant viewed the 2026 irregular migration crisis as primarily a national security or humanitarian concern. While participants recognized that irregular migration carries both national security and humanitarian implications, the difference was in their assigned weight when analyzing the challenge.

Those who placed more weight on a national security approach, for example, suggested “moving the border” to countries further to the south where migration-related paperwork and asylum claims could be processed. In the longer term, they prioritized strengthening the ability of security actors to address illicit crime and human smuggling as part of a broader, more comprehensive suite of migration policies that could allow migration flows to be safer and more secure. Most participants acknowledged that national security risks were real but limited—both in potential impact and in terms of the origin of the risk (e.g., smugglers and traffickers pose a greater risk than a migrant mother and child)—and yet that they played an outsized role in influencing migration-related policies. Those who placed more weight on the humanitarian aspects of the irregular migration crisis prioritized immediate care in the form of food, proper shelter, and other needs that are common to migrants arriving at the border. They also pointed out the need to process asylum claims more efficiently. In the longer term, they argued for comprehensive economic assistance to address the political, climate-related, and other aspects of fragility at the root of migration from Central America.

Participants agreed that narrative matters, though the specific contents of the narrative remained elusive. As such a divisive topic, whichever approach the government takes to address the migration crisis in the short and longer terms would inevitably lead to some backlash. In the short term, participants posited that deliberate messaging could cool the heated domestic debate. Doing so would require trusted messengers—ranging from clergy to educators to pop culture figures—to counter pervasive misinformation and to present framing that acknowledges fears on all sides while touting the benefits of the shift toward a more legal, orderly, and safe migration system. Some participants suggested that the messaging should focus on the drivers of migration, such as climate change, fragility and violence, and the lack of economic opportunities, while others focused on the importance of more economic or national security-focused messaging, for example, the need for migrant labor for agricultural harvests. In either case, the messages were deemed to be more credible when coming from migrants themselves. Sympathetic figures, such as mothers and children, can help reemphasize the humanity of migrants. Political leaders—especially at the national level—may be better off on the sidelines.
The Public Response to the Migration Scenario

Public respondents diverged with workshop experts over the types (short versus long term) of options preferred. They also split among themselves via partisan lines. While a majority of surveyed experts chose long-term options to address the underlying causes of irregular migration—increasing the capacity of the asylum system to review cases and expand the legal immigration system (71 percent) and increasing the ability of the U.S. government to deal with migration-related issues (50 percent)—the public was more divided. For example, 45 percent of public respondents supported increasing the capacity of the asylum system, and only 33 percent supported increasing capacities to deal with migration-related issues. Additionally, the preference of short-term over long-term response options between experts and the public were perfectly inverted: while 57 percent of expert responses were in support of long-term measures to address the issue, 57 percent of supported options among public respondents were oriented toward short-term measures. This suggests more appetite among experts for addressing longer-term systemic issues and a skeptical public that prioritizes the short term. It also highlights the importance of emphasizing the short term when trying to influence the public.

Lastly, the irregular migration scenario showed the greatest gap among public respondents based on political orientation, with right-of-center respondents supporting more hard security responses and left-of-center voters preferring systematic reforms. For example, while 71 percent of “Extremely Conservative” respondents supported the deployment of military forces to the border for surveillance, only 43 percent of “Extremely Liberal/Progressive” respondents chose this option. Meanwhile, 57 percent of “Left Leaning” respondents indicated that they would support increasing the capacity of the asylum system and expanding the legal immigration system, while only 33 percent of “Right Leaning” respondents chose that option. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is significantly more division within the U.S. public related to foreign policy responses to irregular migration than for other issues. This reflects concerns expressed by experts—96 percent of whom self-identified as either “Left Leaning” (27 percent), “Centrist” (40 percent), or “Right Leaning” (29 percent) politically—within the scenario workshop over the challenge of public opinion polarization on the issue.

Scenario 3: China Encroaches on Taiwan’s Kinmen Islands (2027)

The language has been kept in its original form with no content edits.

It is 2027 and fears of a major war between China and Taiwan have been on the rise for years. Chinese military, economic, and diplomatic pressure on Taiwan increased after the 2024 Taiwanese Presidential election. By 2026, there are weekly Chinese incursions into the island’s air defense identification zone. In the last three months, these activities have intensified through military operations focused on the Taiwanese Kinmen Islands, which are ten kilometers off the coast of mainland China, as Beijing seeks to claim jurisdiction over the Kinmen Islands. In 2027, the Kinmen Islands leap into international news when a gas pipeline explosion damages a nearby Chinese fishing vessel. Chinese media claims that the explosion resulted from an attack by Taiwanese separatists and uses it as an opportunity to expand its air identification zone to cover the entirety of Kinmen, and to conduct military exercises in the East China Sea, simulating attack runs to the north and south of Taiwan while entering
the Japanese airspace. As Japan deploys naval vessels in response, multiple countries warn of the risk of the Kinmen crisis sparking a wider military confrontation with China. In response, world stock markets drop 5 percent as funds shift to U.S. bonds and gold prices surge. Taiwan requests assistance and the U.S. President is under increasing pressure to respond to this economic and military challenge.48

Concern over the global influence of a rising China is a bipartisan phenomenon. The bipartisan group of participants in the scenario agreed that taking action to defend Taiwan was an imperative for ideological, economic, and geopolitical reasons under certain conditions and scenarios. A failure to push back against a Chinese annexation of the Kinmen Islands would undermine U.S. credibility. Taiwan is also a beacon of democracy in a region where democratic values are continuously undermined by China. Defending the Kinmen Islands would thus be important to maintain Taiwan’s stable democratic presence in East Asia, though participants acknowledged that a loss of Kinmen would not, on its own, end Taiwan’s democracy. Taiwan is also an important contributor to the global economy, home to the world’s largest manufacturer of semiconductor chips—which are used in most electrical devices, from weapons systems to cars to refrigerators. Maintaining the stability of the production of semiconductors is crucial to keeping global supply chains and the broader global production of electronics running smoothly. Therefore, while divides may exist on how to best defend Taiwan while avoiding escalation into a U.S.-China conflict, there was no disagreement on the importance of acting in support of Taiwan if it was not the instigator.

Building off this greater public apprehension of China, participants quickly zoomed out, concluding that the United States should consider expanding and updating the permanent security architecture in Asia to counter Chinese aggression and maintain U.S. credibility with allies in the region in the longer term. In the short term, participants agreed that the crisis resulting from Chinese gray zone action required managing escalation as well as deterring future such actions by imposing strategic—though non-kinetic—costs on China. Doing so effectively would be critical for Taiwan’s continued self-governance as well as for the broader fight for democracy in the region.

In pursuing deterrence through strategic costs, the challenge for the executive branch would be twofold. The first challenge would be to form unified short-term messaging across key stakeholders, including the U.S. Congress, the private sector, and allied governments. Though political polarization is unlikely to have abated by 2027, the White House should nonetheless endeavor to find common ground with leaders from both parties in Congress, without which policy options would be limited at a time when as many as possible should be on the table. With so much of the world economy flowing through the region, private sector support for—and alignment behind—any reaction is critical. Multinational corporations operating in China, for example, could be less eager to support U.S. action in support of Taiwan for fear of retaliation from China that could jeopardize their earning potential and financial relationships in the country. The support of those willing to speak out could be influential, especially as part of a broader private sector movement to reassess the costs and benefits of doing business in China. Similarly, juggling the expectations and views of partners and allies in the region and around the world—particularly allied nations that have taken historically nonconfrontational approaches toward China—would be both tricky and crucial, as would an effort to build an international front against aggressive Chinese action in the gray zone. It is important to note, however, that not all partners and allies will be equally anxious—or equally important—during such a crisis and that their involvement should be assessed accordingly. Japan and Australia, for example, are likely to
be eager to coordinate responses closely with the United States, while more distant partners and allies in Europe or Southeast Asia might be more ambivalent or cautious.

The final challenge envisioned by participants would be longer term: how can the United States maintain credible deterrence in the region without the crisis escalating from a gray zone incursion into a longer-term armed conflict? The participants debated what combination of deterrents—from economic sanctions and blockades to increasing cooperation with allies and joint shows of military force—would be effective against China while also gaining general support from the three key stakeholder groups referenced above. Ultimately, participants did not reach a consensus on the combination of deterrents; however, they did agree that the more punitive and kinetic the deterrent, the less likely this coalition would hold.

**The Public Response to the Taiwan Scenario**

Public survey respondents diverged significantly from workshop experts over this scenario. Whereas 73 percent of workshop experts supported Short-Term Option 1 (“Escort Taiwanese commercial flights and maritime traffic to Kinmen”), only 44 percent of public respondents chose this option. Of public respondents, 51 percent preferred Short-Term Option 2 (“Conduct a FONOP in the Taiwan Strait”), which was supported by only 20 percent of experts. In similarly divergent results, public respondents were more confident in the likelihood of bipartisan policy response—although still divided on the details of that response—than surveyed workshop experts. Whereas 60 percent of public respondents cited the likelihood of bipartisan response as either “possible” or “almost certain,” only 33 percent of experts selected those options. While experts cited public opinion or upcoming elections (33 percent for both) as the largest perceived barrier to achieving a bipartisan consensus on the issue, a slight plurality (29 percent) of the public viewed internal party issues as the largest barrier, over public opinion (24 percent) and upcoming elections (19 percent). This may suggest that the U.S. public attributes much more of the foreign policy inoperability to government political issues (e.g., a divided Congress) than to the weight of the U.S. public opinion. Interestingly, 70 percent of those self-identifying as politically “Centrist,” “Left Leaning,” or “Extremely Liberal/Progressive” cited internal party issues as the largest barrier to achieving consensus on this Taiwan-related crisis.

The scenario-based workshops were designed to elicit debate and disagreement, both in framing and in participant backgrounds and viewpoints. Similarly, the public survey included a diverse group of respondents who were not expected to align behind specific responses (full results of the public survey can be found in Appendix D). The goal of both was to explore the points at which consensus—or at least deconfliction—was possible.

This chapter brought the challenges facing foreign policymakers into stark and detailed relief, especially during moments of crisis. It showed how the lessons of the past collide with the domestically divided realities of today, reinforcing the perception that the topography of political polarization in the United States is littered with canyons and chasms. However, it also provided policymakers with the beginnings of a path forward: among the divides there is still plenty of flatland, areas of foundational convergence on which the broader softening—or even bridging—of today’s sharp divides can occur. Key policy implications that should be considered on that path forward are presented in Chapter 4.
Policy Implications

On the State of the Domestic Divides

Americans are not isolationists. Interest in the conduct of foreign policy matters beyond Washington, D.C., and the public strongly prefers an active United States. This is clear from the workshop findings and public survey data. Majorities in both the survey of workshop participants and the public survey said the United States should be more involved in the world or that engagement levels should stay the same, compared to only 33 percent of respondents across both surveys who believe the United States should be less involved. Sustained or increased global engagement also had strong bipartisan support from 66 percent of people identifying as “Extremely Liberal/Progressive” and 57 percent of those identifying as “Extremely Conservative.” Workshop participants—96 percent of whom self-identified as either “Left Leaning” (27 percent), “Centrist” (40 percent), or “Right Leaning” (29 percent) politically—also preferred an active United States. However, much like in the historical examples of Chapter 1, many pointed to the brief window following the onset of a crisis during which support for action will be high. This “rally around the flag” effect, however, is increasingly short-lived in the age of 24-hour news cycles and social media and as opponents to those in power paint all actions, foreign and domestic, in a negative light. This difficulty in garnering interest or convergence in the longer term was also evident in the public survey, with 58 percent of respondents aligning behind short-term options over longer-term ones.

Partisan identification matters, but not as much as expected. Self-identification along the identified five-point political spectrum (“Extremely Liberal/Progressive,” “Left Leaning,” “Centrist,” “Right Leaning,” and “Extremely Conservative”) was less important and did not significantly influence which types of responses (diplomatic, military, or economic) were prioritized at the tactical rather than strategic level. Public survey respondents consistently chose 30 to 34 percent of their options from
each type of response. In other words, an “Extremely Conservative” respondent was about as likely to evenly distribute responses across all three response types as an “Extremely Liberal/Progressive” respondent. This means that while domestic divides certainly exist, they are not as easily split across party lines and are likely not as sharp when assessing foreign policy options.

The public is more divided than the experts. While only 2 percent of workshop participants self-identified with the extreme ends of the political spectrum, 41 percent of public respondents identified as such. This means that consensus among experts is likely easier than with the public. Despite the fact that partisan identification did not seem to matter with regards to military, political, or economic option selection (see above), the public survey did show greater ideological separation than the survey of foreign policy experts participating in the workshop. Workshop participants acknowledged this partisan divide and discussed the importance of understanding its impact on foreign policy, particularly emphasizing the need to address a wide range of concerns in communicating with the U.S. public.

On Making Foreign Policy in an Era of Domestic Division

Leaders must incorporate domestic considerations into U.S. foreign policymaking. It is clear that foreign policymakers acknowledge the influence of domestic divides—political and otherwise—on their
options. Of surveyed workshop participants, 44 percent stated that public opinion was the biggest barrier to achieving bipartisan consensus, a plurality of responses for that question. Considerations also go beyond public opinion since foreign policy implications can be felt at home. For example, foreign policymakers must think through the domestic economic implications of crises; in the Taiwan and Bab al-Mandeb (BAM) Strait scenarios, workshop participants had to consider how escalating conflicts with China and in the Middle East would affect global supply chains and the U.S. economy. Of particular interest is the impact of such foreign action on the pocketbooks of everyday Americans.

Policymaker perceptions of what the public would endorse sometimes eliminated courses of action that otherwise might have been valuable options. This is significant because foreign policymakers are periodically faced with making decisions that might be out of step with public opinion but in the national security interests of the United States. At these points of divergence, participants were left assessing how much public opinion matters, whether achieving bipartisanship was worth the corresponding constraints on action, and what to do in the absence of both. Bipartisanship was deemed important, but participants acknowledged that preconditioning action on bipartisan support can tie the hands of U.S. foreign policymakers during a crisis, especially when searching for the impossible perfect. Thus, bipartisanship should not be the only goal since polarization will likely continue to be the default setting in U.S. politics for the foreseeable future. The act of seeking consensus and favorable public opinion should be accompanied with the sober acknowledgment that doing so should not come at the expense of imperfect action that could have an overall benefit to U.S. national security. Inaction is a choice, and it can have greater consequences than action.

Foreign policymakers are periodically faced with making decisions that might be out of step with public opinion but in the national security interests of the United States.

Experts showed more risk tolerance than the public. A recent CSIS survey (separate from the one conducted for the purposes of this report) on “Mapping the Future of U.S. China Policy” (heretofore referred to as the “U.S. China Policy survey”) found that while “[most] Americans are prepared to take considerable risk to defend U.S. allies and partners against military threats from China,” surveyed U.S. thought leaders were significantly more willing to risk military action than the U.S. public. For example, while 53 percent and 34 percent of thought leaders said they would “take significant risk” to defend Japan and Taiwan, respectively, only 13 percent and 15 percent of the U.S. public said the same. This aversion to military tools is especially prevalent when direct ties to U.S. national security are less clear in the eyes of the public. Even so, these options must be considered for their relative strength in deterring future crises and avoiding escalation, especially since both deterrence and escalation avoidance are also of public interest. It is useful to know that preferences can—and often do—including simultaneous support for the utilization of non-kinetic tools, expectations of their effectiveness in deterrence, and their ability to avoid escalation, whether or not all can be achieved given the crisis at hand. The calculation of foreign policymakers will look different depending on the scenario and the strength of public interest.
Public fear of longer-term foreign military entanglement is real and constraining, though such fears do not extend to U.S. foreign involvement more broadly. Foreign policy experts participating in the workshop were slightly more inclined to favor security options (42 percent of expert responses were for military instead of diplomatic and economic options) and were more willing to engage militarily for longer (57 percent of these expert responses were longer-term options). Though a slightly lower 35 percent of responses on the public survey were for security options, only 42 percent of these were for longer-term options. Nonetheless, fear of escalation was apparent in the public survey and among workshop participants, and the latter showed significant reticence to establish “enemies,” whether they be geostrategic (e.g., China and Iran) or personal (e.g., irregular migrants) in nature. The preference of participants and survey respondents was toward active engagement through non-kinetic means.

On Softening Sharp Divides

The reason for action must be clear and clearly articulated; also, messages matter, but so do the messengers. Even if it is out of step with the public or the opposition party, clearly articulated messaging about an action is always important. Policymakers do have some power in shaping the public narrative and have broader options available with public support; geostrategic rivals have access to the same news reports of sharp U.S. domestic divides as Americans do. Contrasting (e.g., the United States and its allies present better long-term economic, political, and security futures than their geostrategic rivals) and affirmative (e.g., the United States is a force for good in the world, promoting human rights and democracy) points can be effective on their own. Though different political administrations will inevitably prefer one over the other, the messages most likely to last beyond a single administration contain elements of both. On the most divisive of issues (e.g., irregular migration from Central America), the effectiveness of the message is also dependent on the messenger, and the right messenger is not always a government official.

Short-term consensus is achievable in the face of a crisis. As previously stated, a majority of people surveyed did not show isolationist tendencies. While not being isolationist—and thus being in favor of a globally active United States—does not automatically translate into consensus action, the scenario-based workshops and public survey showed that consensus is possible, though more likely in the short term than for longer time frames. Longer-term, post-crisis policy options, on the other hand, illustrated more fundamental elements of the domestic divides. Participants across all three scenario-based workshops aligned more quickly and comprehensively behind short-term courses of action, even if in theory they preferred longer-term options. For example, 52 percent of workshop participants favored longer-term response options compared to 48 percent for short-term options. Alternatively, 42 percent of public respondents favored longer-term response options compared to 58 percent for short-term options.

Friends and allies matter. Across all three scenario-based workshops, effective crisis response in the short and longer term relied heavily on coordination with like-minded allies, multilateral entities, and other international partners. While public survey respondents chose security options at a similar rate to diplomatic and economic options (as discussed above), many of these security options involved international cooperation. The U.S. China Policy survey similarly found that “U.S., European, and Asian thought leaders agree that the best way to deal with China as a national security problem is through increased collaboration among like-minded states.”50 Friends and allies matter broadly in times of crisis but can also help in making the case for action to the American public.
Debates should be grounded in areas of consensus, wherever they exist. If a crisis constrains the ability of citizens to access heat in the winter (as was the case in the BAM Strait scenario) or threatens global democracy (as was the case in the scenario about China’s gray zone activity in Taiwan), the obvious lines of consensus are useful grounding points. People need heat in the winter, and democracy is better than autocracy. Of course, obvious lines of consensus may not be easy to identify; public survey respondents were much further apart (average standard deviation of 1.8) regarding the migration scenario than the Taiwan scenario (average standard deviation of 0.7), where protection of an ally was a major factor. Even on the BAM Strait scenario, where action in the short term was deemed critical to restore global movement of goods and energy, survey respondents were divided (standard deviation of 1.5), likely a reflection of lingering polarization on anything perceived to be active intervention in the Middle East and partisan disagreements over energy transition. As efforts to develop solutions are influenced by viewpoints representing all sharp divides, when messaging fails, policymakers can revert back to these points of consensus—which are likely the result of the relative severity of the crisis itself for the public.

Unpopular decisions will be necessary, but how they are communicated is important. When an unpopular decision is necessary, policymakers should present the need for the course of action, acknowledge divergent opinions, and clearly state the goals of the action. Workshop participants agreed that the United States needs better and more comprehensive communication to the U.S. public about foreign policy priorities. Even in the absence of public support, U.S. foreign policymakers can shape the public narrative.
About the Authors

**Erol Yayboke** is a senior fellow with the International Security Program and director of the Project on Fragility and Mobility at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). His specific research interests include migration and forced displacement, violent conflict and global fragility, conflict-aware stabilization, violent extremism, climate change, civil-military cooperation, and disruptive technologies. Previously, he was a senior fellow and deputy director with the CSIS Project on Prosperity and Development. Prior to CSIS, Mr. Yayboke served on the Hillary Clinton presidential campaign as well as the Evidence for Policy Design team at the Center for International Development at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government. Mr. Yayboke has long-term field experience working for organizations (Global Communities, Save the Children, and AECOM International Development) in Iraq, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and the Somali Region of Ethiopia, serving in various senior management roles. He holds an MPA from the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin and a BBA in international business, also from the University of Texas at Austin. He is fluent in Turkish and Spanish.

**Emily Harding** is deputy director and senior fellow with the International Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). She joined CSIS from the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI), where she was deputy staff director. In her nearly 20 years of government service, she has served in a series of high-profile national security positions at critical moments. While working for SSCI, she led the Committee’s multiyear investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 elections. The five-volume, 1,300-page report reshaped the way the United States defends itself against foreign adversaries seeking to manipulate elections, and it was lauded for its rigor, its thoroughness, and as the only bipartisan effort on election interference. During her tenure on the Committee, she also served as the subject matter expert on election security, counterintelligence and associated
cybersecurity issues, and the Middle East. She oversaw the activities of 18 intelligence agencies and led SSCI staff in drafting legislation, conducting oversight of the intelligence community, and developing their expertise in intelligence community matters. She began her career as a leadership analyst at CIA, and then became a manager of analysts and analytic programs. She led the Iraq Group during the attempted Islamic State takeover of Iraq and Syria and led a multidisciplinary group of analysts working crises worldwide, drawing from many perspectives to provide rich analysis to policymakers. During a tour at the National Security Council, she served as executive assistant to the deputy national security adviser for global democracy strategy and then as director for Iran, where she led interagency efforts to create innovative policies drawing on all elements of national power. After leaving the White House, she served on a team running the first Office of the Director of National Intelligence-led presidential transition, where she was responsible for liaising with both campaigns and briefing the incoming administration on a wide range of intelligence topics. Harding holds a master’s degree in public policy from Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government and a bachelor’s degree in foreign affairs from the University of Virginia.

Sierra Ballard was a research intern for the Project on Fragility and Mobility at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), where she provided research support in project planning and development. Her research specialization includes topics related to global fragility and international conflict resolution, human rights, climate change, migration and refugee protection, and transatlantic relations. Outside her time at CSIS, Ms. Ballard works as an associate consultant on international projects advancing social justice, equity, and democratic societies. She holds an advanced MSc in international relations and diplomacy from Leiden University, where she studied international negotiations and conflict resolution under the Dutch Clingendael Academy, and a BA in political science from Iowa State University. Prior to her time with CSIS, Ms. Ballard worked in Brussels as a research trainee for GLOBSEC, a Central and Eastern European think tank focused on issues of European integration, security, and democratic governance. She has been extensively engaged in advocacy and support of human rights and international sustainable development, serving as a national campaign representative for NextGen Climate in 2016 and a United Nations Youth Assembly Delegate in 2017.

Catherine Nzuki is a research assistant for the Project on Fragility and Mobility at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), where she manages program initiatives and conducts research on state fragility and human migration. Prior to joining CSIS, she interned with No Isolation, a Norwegian tech start-up, in their London office. She also interned with Oxford Analytica, a geopolitical analysis and consulting firm, in New York City. Additionally, Catherine was an intern with the Tanzania Women Chamber of Commerce, a women’s economic empowerment nongovernmental organization in Dar es Salaam. She holds a BA in politics with a minor in philosophy from Bates College.
Appendix A
2021 Global Security Forum Workshop Participants

Jon Alterman  Chris Bernotavicius  Kari Bingen
Jude Blanchette  Charles Boustany  Jessica Brandt
Mike Casey  Asha Castleberry-Hernandez  Carey Cavanaugh
Eliot Cohen  Elbridge Colby  Zack Cooper
Lisa Curtis  Mackenzie Eaglen  Eric Edelman
Matt Goodman  Matthew Green  Michael Green
David Hanke  Emily Harding  Anthony Johnson
Elizabeth Hoffman  Benjamin Jensen  Brian Kelly
Jamie Jones Miller  Seth Jones  Beverly Kirk
Beverly Kirk  Jacob Kurtzer  Mary Beth Long
Michelle Macander  Cesar Martinez  Christy Martins
Marie McAuliffe  Tara McFeely  Jenny McGee
Brian McSorley  Andrew Natsios  Kathleen Newland
Danielle Ngo  LeRoy Potts  Christopher Reid
Linda Robinson  Norman Roule  Nilmini Rubin
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ariel Ruiz</th>
<th>Beth Sanner</th>
<th>Nadia Schadlow</th>
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<tr>
<td>John Schaus</td>
<td>Daniel Schneiderman</td>
<td>Jennifer Sciubba</td>
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<td>Michael Singh</td>
<td>Jen Stewart</td>
<td>Marin Strmecki</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matthew Strohmeyer</td>
<td>Beza Tesfaye</td>
<td>Mischa Thompson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amali Tower</td>
<td>Erol Yayboke</td>
<td>Shaarik Zafar</td>
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Appendix B

Scenarios

The language has been kept in its original form with no content edits.

Scenario 1

2022 Bab al-Mandeb Scenario

Severe disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz lead to global shocks

- The Crisis: Iranian proxies use a combination of swarming UAS, coastal defense cruise missiles, and small boats to close the Bab al-Mandeb (BAM) Strait disrupting global supply chains.
- The Policy Challenge: how to restore international freedom of navigation and prevent the region from sliding into a broader conflict.

THE CRISIS

It is 2022 and Yemen remains a proxy battleground between Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Iran. Despite on-again, off-again talks between the states, Iran continues to support a network of groups across the Middle East with missiles, explosive boats, drones, and advisers as part of a larger strategy of using unconventional warfare to advance its regional interests. In Yemen, Tehran backs the Houthis in a civil war that shows few signs of ending despite periodic truces and transitional governments. Saudi Arabia continues to back the Yemeni government to check Iran’s advance. There are indications and warnings terrorist groups may take advantage of the shifting frontlines and ungoverned spaces to reconstitute safe havens.

Despite the civil war and its status as a fragile state, Yemen’s strategic importance remains due to its geography. The BAM Strait is vital as global trade returns to pre-pandemic levels and liquified natural gas (LNG) routes begin to head south destined for markets in Asia and north to Europe where demand...
is growing. The global demand for natural gas is high as countries seek alternatives to coal and oil, pressured by global compacts and social movements seeking to address climate change. The route is also critical to non-energy trade as the world emerges from the pandemic. None of the economic booms in trade helps Yemen, where a lack of access to water, high levels of displacement, politically induced starvation, and recurrent public health emergencies plague the nation.

In the winter of 2022, events take a turn for the worse. A high-profile air strike in Yemen by the Saudis results in the death of three members of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and a senior Houthi leader. Without evidence, Tehran claims that the United States planned the attack as well as provided the intelligence. Houthi leaders organize mass protests against Saudi Arabia and the United States during vigils for what they call “the victims of American oppressors.” Two days later, a Saudi frigate is attacked by a drone boat and at least two anti-ship cruise missiles in the Red Sea. Simultaneously, ballistic missiles fired from Houthi-controlled territory strike a Saudi base on the Red Sea Island of Zuqar, and Saudi air defense shoots down ten drones targeting oil processing facilities at Abqaiq and Khurais in eastern Saudi Arabia. The United States uses backchannel diplomacy to convince the Saudis to hold off on a military response while regional international and regional diplomatic bodies like the Gulf Cooperation Council are engaged. The next day, a U.S. Destroyer transiting the BAM reports intercepting two anti-ship cruise missiles fired from Yemen and responds in self-defense destroying the launcher. Intelligence reports indicate the missiles were Noor long-range anti-ship missiles fired from mobile launchers. Radar emissions during the attack also indicate the presence of Iranian supplied Khordad 15 surface-to-air missiles (SAM). The Houthis falsely claim the United States killed a family.

Two days later, a Maersk container ship transiting the Red Sea is damaged in a similar attack. Within minutes, futures contracts on shipping forward freight agreements (FFA) skyrocket. The next day there is a backlog of cargo ships at the Suez Canal and outside the Red Sea. Economists warn of a new global supply chain disruption and inflationary pressures from the overnight 20 percent jump in energy prices and estimates of a return to oil prices over 140 dollars per barrel. There is growing concern about the potential impact on upcoming elections across Europe and the United States.

At a press conference aired on social media and Al Masirah, the Houthi TV outlet, the group announces a blockade of the BAM until the Saudi-led coalition stops attacks against Yemen and U.S. forces complicit in the slaughter withdraw from the Red Sea. The video footage shows new Qiam 1 ballistic missiles and suicide aerial drones similar to models used in Iranian military exercises.

Within a week, a major energy crisis hits the United States and Europe and puts pressure on prices globally. Impacted by high prices and the prospects of shortages, European partners, Japan and India consult their U.S. counterparts seeking a rapid, peaceful end to the crisis. In the United States, there is panic buying, causing shortages and long lines at gas stations, despite limited impact on U.S. oil supply. A growing chorus of experts on U.S. television warn that the longer the disruption lasts, the more prices will increase and trigger cascading economic effects, including higher unemployment as factories adjust their output due to supply chain disruptions. The situation is made worse by weather forecasts predicting a polar vortex will hit the Midwest in the coming days.

The President was on a trip to Southeast Asia when the blockade occurred and came back to Washington early to monitor the situation. Pundits across the political spectrum are blaming the President for the fuel shortages, price hikes, and growing economic shocks. The Texas governor holds a press conference calling for energy independence. A network of progressive Congressmen holds
a separate event chastising the President for not doing enough to reduce America’s dependence on hydrocarbons. Bipartisan pressure in Congress and across the country is mounting for the administration to act. The Gulf Cooperation Council joins the Yemeni government in protesting the attacks at the UN Security Council, but Russia limits action against Iran. Leaked conversations between China’s ambassador to the United Nations and his Iranian counterpart reveal that Beijing would like a quick end to the blockade as it is also having adverse effects on Chinese supply chains. European states call for protecting freedom of navigation. Saudi Arabia, which for now has only reacted with strong statements of condemnation and frantic bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, vows to take imminent military action.

THE POLICY CHALLENGE

The U.S. President is under pressure to respond to the growing military and economic crisis. The National Security Council staff has already met and are preparing for a Deputies Committee meeting to make recommendations on how to protect the economy and restore freedom of navigation. Longer-term, give recommendations for promoting regional stability and reducing the risk of the U.S. being pulled into conflicts in the Middle East. His team requests that you 1) recommend six options based on the crisis response menu put together at the previous Policy Coordination Committee meeting, and 2) provide a “big idea” on how the President can effectively communicate and lead in this crisis while navigating an increasingly polarized political dynamic.
### INSTRUMENTS

#### Short Term

- **Diplomacy**
  - Meet with ambassadors from Europe and the region to coordinate public calls to restore freedom of navigation
  - Work with European partners to have China and Russia pressure Iran on weapons shipments to the Houthis
- **Military, Security & Law Enforcement**
  - Reposition Fifth Fleet assets to provide intelligence and expanded strike options to support re-establishing freedom of navigation
  - Conduct a FONOP in the Red Sea to challenge the blockade
- **Economic, Development**
  - Release the strategic oil reserve
  - Organize an energy summit to look at new infrastructure to avoid conflict-prone transit routes such as pipeline development in the Mediterranean

#### Long Term

- **Diplomacy**
  - Expand multi-lateral efforts to include coercive measures in an effort to broker a new truce in the Yemen civil war
  - Engage European partners on forming a new task force for ensuring freedom of navigation in the Red Sea
- **Military, Security & Law Enforcement**
  - Increase Gulf State FMS for air defenses and other systems capable of interdicting ASCM, drones, and ballistic missiles
  - Alter force posture to increase strike assets in CENTCOM long-term to respond to Iran’s support to proxies in the region
- **Economic, Development**
  - Accelerate green energy transition programs in the US
  - Take measures to expand US LNG exports and construct new pipelines

#### Other (Limit Two)

- **Big Idea**

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**Scenario 2**

**2026 Migration Scenario**

*Political turmoil in Central America leads to increased irregular migration flows.*

- The Crisis: there are indications and warnings a massive spike in migrants headed to the U.S. southern border in the next 30 days.
- The Policy Challenge: how do you prevent the current crisis and decrease the likelihood of future complex migration crises in a polarized republic?

**THE CRISIS**

It is 2026 and there is a storm on the horizon in Central America. Since 2022, a wave of natural disasters has hit socio-economically vulnerable countries already struggling to cope. The legacy of colonialism, racism, and past conflicts continue to produce high levels of inequality, land disputes and
reduce access to basic services. Persistently high levels of corruption and criminal groups competing to control transnational smuggling routes further erode the capacity of communities to organize and hold their governments accountable. Remittances are uneven, depriving the countries of key sources of income as a result of high levels of inflation linked to strained global supply chains, a weaker dollar, and legislation in northern countries limiting migrant workers. The net result is sustained high levels of migration from Central America to the United States.

Compounding the crisis, recent presidential elections in Honduras (2025) and El Salvador (2024) resulted in victories for candidates with known ties to illicit groups. Both new presidents, who remain under indictment from U.S. courts, cracked down on opposition groups. The new regimes used a mix of traditional, heavy-handed “law and order” tactics alongside contemporary spyware from private sector cybersecurity firms. Pressed for hard currency, the officials opened indigenous land – already under threat due to climate change – to private logging companies. Criminal networks increasingly interact with senior officials and street gangs control entire neighborhoods resulting in high levels of extortion, corruption, violence, and decreased economic activity.

The situation pushes hundreds of thousands of people to leave home each year. Many of them attempt to come to the U.S. via Guatemala and Mexico. Those on the move do not have regular, safe, and orderly means through which to do so, ultimately attempting to enter the United States irregularly or to seek asylum. U.S. and Mexican policies towards people on the move have tightened in recent years, forcing more people into irregular movement channels and opening new sources of revenue for illicit, opportunistic operators (e.g., traffickers, smugglers, coyotes, gangs, and others) mostly agnostic to the asset they move. At the same time, immigration continues to be a divisive issue in the United States with dim prospects of bipartisan compromise on border security or comprehensive immigration reform. As the complex emergency in Central America leads to escalating tensions along the U.S. southern border, it is unclear where U.S. foreign policy priorities should be, where and how they overlap with more domestic immigration policies, and at what points the U.S. can and should intervene in response to an escalating crisis.

Heading into the fall of 2026, there are indications warning of a likely spike in migration based on social media trends, Department of Homeland Security assessments, and cables from embassies in Central America and Mexico. The region is still struggling from the latest hurricane, which swelled rivers in multiple countries causing massive flooding, and a new wave of civil unrest. Analysts project a surge in migration over the next 30-60 days that could see as many as a million people on the move and push immigration levels from Central America to their highest level ever recorded.

The sharp increase in migration comes at a time when Americans are more polarized than ever in their views towards immigration. A 2026 survey showed that half (50 percent) of Americans say that immigration strengthens the U.S., and the other half say that they are a burden. Views on immigration differed according to party affiliation: 89 percent of Democrats and people that lean towards the Democratic Party say that immigrants are a strength, not a burden, compared to 27 percent of Republicans.

**THE POLICY CHALLENGE**

The U.S. President is under pressure to respond. The National Security Council has already met and is preparing for a Deputies meeting to make recommendations to the President on how to respond to the expected surge in migration. Her team requests that you 1) recommend six options based on the crisis
response menu put together at the previous Policy Coordination Committee meeting and 2) provide a “big idea” on how the President can effectively communicate and lead in this crisis while navigating an increasingly polarized political dynamic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INSTRUMENTS</th>
<th>SHORT TERM</th>
<th>LONG TERM</th>
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</table>
| **Diplomacy**                      | ▪ Senior U.S. political leaders engage with regional heads and civil society organizations to find immediate solutions to curb migration as well as convene multiple regional and international bodies to address the surge  
▪ Request Mexico to open reception facilities for migrants | ▪ Develop new bilateral agreements for rapidly returning migrants that do not meet asylum standards to both home and host countries  
▪ Develop a regional compact to address migration and its root causes |
| **Military, Security & Law Enforcement** | ▪ Increase DHS assets along the border  
▪ Deploy military forces to the border for surveillance and providing options for care/feeding/repatriation of migrants | ▪ Increase the capacity of the asylum system to review cases and expand the legal immigration system  
▪ Increase the ability of the USG to deal with migration-related issues |
| **Economic, Development**          | ▪ Increase the capacity of the asylum system to review cases and expand the legal immigration system  
▪ Increase the ability of the USG to deal with migration-related issues | ▪ Provide grants to local U.S. communities for job training linked to new migration surges  
▪ Provide increased development assistance linked to job creation in Central America |
| Other (Limit Two)                  |                                                                             |                                                                           |

**Scenario 3**

**2027 Taiwan Scenario**

*Natural disaster triggers occupation of Taiwan-controlled island off the coast of mainland China.*

- The Crisis: China accelerates a gray zone campaign targeting a Taiwanese Island.
- The Policy Challenge: respond to gray zone activity without triggering a major war.
THE CRISIS

Fears of a major war between China and Taiwan have been on the rise for years. In 2022 after the 20th Party Congress, Xi Jinping gave a landmark speech on Taiwan signaling China could no longer wait to reintegrate the rogue province. The speech was a central part of a nationalist wave during the 2022 economic crisis that followed major property developers defaulting on their debt. Chinese military, economic, and diplomatic pressure on Taiwan increased further after the 2024 Taiwanese Presidential election with its slogans of “popular sovereignty” and the poor showing by the KMT. By 2026, there are weekly incursions into the island’s air defense identification zone by as many as thirty PLAAF aircraft at a time including fighters, nuclear-capable bombers, and anti-submarine warfare platforms. The Eastern Theater Command routinely conducts snap exercises to signal its capabilities to isolate the island. Over the last three months, the activities included sending naval surface action groups off the eastern coast of Taiwan, simulated strikes by the strategic rocket forces and strategic support forces, and testing a WU-14, hypersonic glide vehicle. Analysts warn these moves signal China’s ability to deny foreign involvement if it invades Taiwan.

During this period of heightened military activity, there has been a corresponding increase in gray zone pressure on the Taiwanese island of Kinmen located 10 kilometers off the coast of China. Though officially governed by the Republic of China (Taiwan), Beijing claims Kinmen as part of its Fujian Province. The island has become a popular tourist destination for mainland tourists since the end of the pandemic in 2022. With tourist revenue also came calls for closer relations with the mainland. China responded by adding gas and electric lines to the undersea pipelines for fresh water it built in 2018. At a ribbon cutting ceremony for the gas line in early 2027, a local Kinmen leader called for turning the island into a “peace experiment zone” and unifying it with the Chinese city of Xiamen.

The call leads to protests in Taipei but little fanfare in Kinmen where residents are economically dependent on mainland China and more supportive of the KMT. During the protests, the media receives leaked emails from the account of a member of the Democratic People’s Party of Taiwan (DPP) stating that if Taiwan declared independence, they should specify that Kinmen and Matsu are not part of the country. The DPP officials accuse China of fabricating the emails. The same week sees a flurry of social media commentary about how the United States destroyed the prospects of a unified China in 1958 (the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis) by supplying Taiwanese troops with artillery and missiles to fend off a Communist invasion of Kinmen. Chinese “wolf warrior” diplomats and netizens circulate the short videos and falsely claim the US sent in secret advisors who committed abuses against locals.

Analysts contend increased Chinese cyber and misinformation activity is designed to counter changing international attitudes towards defending Taiwan. Since 2021, opinion polls show a slim majority of the U.S. public consistently favors the use of U.S. troops to defend Taiwan if China invades. In Japan, polling data shows a majority favor government measures to promote peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

The Kinmen crisis deepens when the gas pipeline explodes causing damage to a nearby Chinese fishing vessel. Without evidence, Chinese state media claims the explosion is the result of an attack by Taiwanese separatists. China deploys a PLAN naval task group to isolate the area and rescue the boat while dispatching construction crews to survey pipeline damage on Kinmen. As the construction crews arrive, they appear to be predominantly military-aged males. There is a tense standoff at the construction site, but Kinmen police refuse to get involved.
The next day, China announces it is further expanding its air identification zone to cover all of Kinmen. The announcement coincides with a large military exercise in which China fires missiles into the East China Sea and over 100 PLAAF aircraft simulate attack runs to the north and south of Taiwan, including entering the Japanese air-defense identification zone. There are unconfirmed reports of heavy electronic magnetic interference in the area and dazzling (i.e., temporary blinding) effects on at least two U.S. imagery satellites. A private cyber security firm warns that Chinese malware may be activated on port infrastructure across the region to further limit any foreign involvement.

Japan deploys a naval task group organized around an Izumo-class multi-purpose destroyer/carrier with twelve F-35B that was conducting exercises with Australian and US naval groups in the Philippine Sea. Despite Taiwan's diplomatic isolation, multiple countries warn the crisis risks sparking a wider confrontation. World stock markets fall five percent as funds shift to U.S. bonds and gold prices surge. Taiwan requests assistance in accompanying its flights and maritime traffic to the island in a test of the Chinese ADIZ.

**THE POLICY CHALLENGE**

The U.S. President is under pressure to respond. The National Security Advisor has asked you to provide your recommendations to the Principal’s Committee on a set of options developed by the Deputies’ Committee earlier today. U.S. objectives remain to deter further escalation of the crisis and preserve the ability of the Taiwanese to defend their sovereignty. Long-term, she wants options for enhancing strategic stability in the region. Her team requests that you 1) recommend six options based on the crisis response menu put together at the Deputies Committee meeting and 2) provide a “big idea” on how the President can effectively communicate and lead in this crisis while navigating an increasingly polarized political dynamic.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INSTRUMENTS</th>
<th>SHORT TERM</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diplomacy</td>
<td>▪ Meet with ambassadors from the region to coordinate public denouncements of Chinese actions ▪ Demarche Chinese officials</td>
<td>▪ Use regional forum to craft a conven that limits the use of military capabilities to avoid future gray zone flashpoints ▪ Meet with Australian, Japanese, and Taiwanese officials in private to discuss response options to future crises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military, Security &amp; Law</td>
<td>▪ Escort Taiwanese commercial flights and maritime traffic to Kinmen ▪ Conduct a FONOP in the Taiwan Strait</td>
<td>▪ Increase foreign military sales to Taiwan ▪ Alter force posture to increase strike assets in INDPACOM capable of ranging Taiwan in a crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enforcement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic, Development</td>
<td>▪ Have treasury officials call Chinese counterparts to signal economic risks ▪ Threaten targeted sanctions to PLA officials linked to operation</td>
<td>▪ Provide economic assistance as a cover for helping Taiwan field additional sensors to detect gray zone incursions ▪ Explore reviving and expanding Trump era tariffs on Chinese activities including the fishing fleet and other economic sectors linked to maritime militia activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (Limit Two)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Big Idea</td>
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Appendix C

2021 Global Security Forum
Pre-discussion Questions

These questions were provided to participants in anticipation of the scenario-based workshops that took place at CSIS headquarters on November 3, 2021:

- What does public skepticism of U.S. global leadership mean for foreign policy? What constraints does this skepticism place on the ability to operate overseas and to advocate for a rules-based international order? What types of foreign policy problems would capture the imagination of the American people?

- For what types of foreign policy problems is public buy-in necessary? How might domestic divisions influence the U.S. response to a crisis?

- What tools does the national security community have to respond to geopolitical challenges and how does the U.S. public feel about their utilization? How can policymakers keep the temperature down at home—especially while U.S. citizens are consistent targets of disinformation and cyber influence operations—while turning up the pressure abroad when needed? Where is the line in public opinion between isolationism and engagement?
Appendix D

Survey Methodology

Expert Survey

To bolster findings of the 2021 Global Security Forum (GSF), CSIS surveyed a total of 44 experts and foreign policy leaders on their opinions related to challenges, feasibility, and options in response to the three hypothetical scenarios shown in Appendix B. This initial expert survey, which respondents were asked to complete ahead of the November 3 workshops, included multiple-choice questions on the likelihood of bipartisan response, perception of barriers to achieving consensus on the crisis at hand, and self-identification along five dimensions of the U.S. political spectrum.

Respondents were presented with three categories: “diplomatic crisis options,” “security crisis options,” and “economic, development, and/or humanitarian crisis options.” Each of these categories provided respondents with two short-term and two long-term policy options in response to a hypothetical request for recommendations from the U.S. national security advisor. Experts were allowed to choose any number of options in each category but were asked to limit their policy recommendations to a total of six options across the three categories. Expert respondents were also given the opportunity to draft their own short policy options in any of the three response categories in advance of the scenario-based workshops. Participants were then asked to respond to a second post-workshop survey, giving them an opportunity to share their opinion once more on the likelihood of bipartisan response and barriers to achieving bipartisan consensus on scenario responses, as well as an opportunity share their “big ideas” for overcoming the challenge of domestic divisions.

Of the 60 workshop participants, a bipartisan group of 44 people responded to the survey, contributing a total of 88 responses from October 29 to November 3, 2021: 32, 24, and 32 responses to the Bab al-Mandeb, migration, and Taiwan scenarios, respectively. All but two of the expert respondents self-
identified as “Left Leaning,” “Centrist,” or “Right Leaning,” reflecting the relative centrism of expert workshop participants (see chart).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POLITICAL ORIENTATION</th>
<th>BAB AL-MANDEB</th>
<th>MIGRATION</th>
<th>TAIWAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Liberal/Progressive</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Leaning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centrist</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right Leaning</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Conservative</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although developed with careful attention to objectivity and methodology, the insights of this expert survey should not be considered determinative and therefore should not be compared extensively to the large sample sizes of public opinion surveys. This report—in particular Chapters 3 and 4—attempts to couple qualitative insights with expert survey results, comparing these in aggregate to lessons from the public surveys.

Public Survey

Three distinct public surveys were conducted online between November 16 and 18. Since all three were designed to elicit both thoughts on specific scenarios and the same broader questions, they are collectively referred to here as the “public survey.” Introductory questions measuring political orientation and attitudes on challenges to policy response were kept the same, but response choices relating to the specific scenario policy options were different. The public survey was conducted to bring a public lens to questions similar to those posed in the GSF expert workshop survey (see above), in order to evaluate U.S. public opinion on foreign policy decisionmaking.

The public survey was conducted online using Survey Monkey utilizing a randomized sample of 2,039 U.S.-based adults, facilitated by Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The randomized sample of responses represents public opinion at the specific moment in time of the survey. For the purposes of this report, the responses constitute an aggregate of individual views and attitudes expressed by a significant noninstitutionalized proportion of the U.S. public.

One control question (“New York City and Houston are in what country?”) was included to eliminate random selection responses; incorrect responses to this question resulted in the removal of the entire survey response. The three public surveys yielded a total of 2093 responses, of which 54 were rejected due to incorrect answers to the control question. As a result, the final sample of responses was 661 for the Bab al-Mandeb scenario, 695 for the migration scenario, and 683 for the Taiwan scenario. Results from the survey evaluated several factors, including self-identified political orientation (see chart) and respondent views on U.S. international engagement.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Orientation</th>
<th>Bab Al-Mandeb</th>
<th>Migration</th>
<th>Taiwan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Liberal/Progressive</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Leaning</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centrist</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right Leaning</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Conservative</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>661</strong></td>
<td><strong>695</strong></td>
<td><strong>683</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E

*Expert Survey Questionnaires*

*The language has been kept in its original form with no content edits.*

*Expert Surveys*

**Bab al-Mandeb Survey Questionnaire**

After Presentation of the scenario, how likely is a bipartisan policy response?

1. Almost Impossible
2. Unlikely
3. Chances are Even
4. Possible
5. Almost Certain

What is the largest barrier to achieving bipartisan consensus on the issue?

- Media
- Upcoming Election
- Internal Party Issues
- Public Opinion

How would you self-identify in terms of the current U.S. political spectrum?

1. Extremely Liberal/Progressive
2. Left Leaning
3. Centrist
BAM Crisis Response Policy Options

_The U.S. President is under pressure to respond to the growing military and economic crisis. The National Security Council staff has already met and are preparing for a Deputies Committee meeting to make recommendations on how to protect the economy and restore freedom of navigation. Longer-term, give recommendations for promoting regional stability and reducing the risk of the U.S. being pulled into conflicts in the Middle East. His team requests that you recommend six options based on the crisis response menu put together at the Deputies Committee meeting._

_NOTE: when you are finished you should have only six boxes checked._

Which of the following diplomatic crisis options would you recommend?

- (Short-term Option 1) Meet with ambassadors from Europe and the region to coordinate public calls to restore freedom of navigation
- (Short-term Option 2) Work with European partners to have China and Russia pressure Iran on weapons shipments to the Houthis
- (Long-term Option 3) Expand multi-lateral efforts to include coercive measures in an effort to broker a new truce in the Yemen civil war
- (Long-term Option 4) Engage European partners on forming a new task force for ensuring freedom of navigation in the Red Sea

Which of the following security crisis options would you recommend?

- (Short-term Option 1) Reposition Fifth Fleet assets to provide intelligence and expanded strike options to support re-establishing freedom of navigation
- (Short-term Option 2) Conduct a FONOP in the Red Sea to challenge the blockade
- (Long-term Option 3) Increase Gulf State FMS for air defenses and other systems capable of interdicting ASCM, drones, and ballistic missiles
- (Long-term Option 4) Alter force posture to increase strike assets in CENTCOM long-term to respond to Iran’s support to proxies in the region

Which of the following economic, development and/or humanitarian crisis options would you recommend?

- (Short-term Option 1) Release the strategic oil reserve
- (Short-term Option 2) Organize an energy summit to look at new infrastructure to avoid conflict-prone transit routes such as pipeline development in the Mediterranean
- (Long-term Option 3) Accelerate green energy transition programs in the U.S.
- (Long-term Option 4) Take measures to expand U.S. LNG exports and construct new pipelines

_Migration Survey Questionnaire_

After Presentation of the scenario, how likely is a bipartisan policy response?

1. Almost Impossible
2. Unlikely
3. Chances are Even
4. Possible
5. Almost Certain

What is the largest barrier to achieving bipartisan consensus on the issue?

- Media
- Upcoming Election
- Internal Party Issues
- Public Opinion

How would you self-identify in terms of the current U.S. political spectrum?

1. Extremely Liberal/Progressive
2. Left Leaning
3. Centrist
4. Right Leaning
5. Extremely Conservative

Migration Crisis Response Policy Options

The U.S. President is under pressure to respond. The National Security Council staff has already met and is preparing for a Deputies meeting to make recommendations on how to respond to the expected surge in migration. Her team requests that you recommend six options based on the crisis response menu put together at the Deputies Committee meeting.

NOTE: when you are finished you should have only six boxes checked.

Which of the following diplomatic crisis options would you recommend?

- (Short-term Option 1) Senior U.S. political leaders engage with regional heads and civil society organizations to find immediate solutions to curb migration as well as convene multiple regional and international bodies to address the surge
- (Short-term Option 2) Request Mexico to open reception facilities for migrants
- (Long-term Option 3) Develop new bilateral agreements for rapidly returning migrants that do not meet asylum standards to both home and host countries
- (Long-term Option 4) Develop a regional compact to address migration and its root causes

Which of the following security crisis options would you recommend?

- (Short-term Option 1) Increase DHS assets along the border
- (Short-term Option 2) Deploy military forces to the border for surveillance and providing options for care/feeding/repatriation of migrants
- (Long-term Option 3) Increase the capacity of the asylum system to review cases and expand the legal immigration system
- (Long-term Option 4) Increase the ability of the USG to deal with migration-related issues
Which of the following economic, development and/or humanitarian crisis options would you recommend?

- (Short-term Option 1) Establish temporary staging areas along the border to provide basic care and feeding while reviewing asylum claims and repatriating
- (Short-term Option 2) Establish a task force to identify and attack illicit gains from migration
- (Long-term Option 3) Provide grants to local U.S. communities for job training linked to new migration surges
- (Long-term Option 4) Provide increased development assistance linked to job creation in Central America

**Taiwan Survey Questionnaire**

After Presentation of the scenario, how likely is a bipartisan policy response?

1. Almost Impossible
2. Unlikely
3. Chances are Even
4. Possible
5. Almost Certain

What is the largest barrier to achieving bipartisan consensus on the issue?

- Media
- Upcoming Election
- Internal Party Issues
- Public Opinion

How would you self-identify in terms of the current U.S. political spectrum?

1. Extremely Liberal/Progressive
2. Left Leaning
3. Centrist
4. Right Leaning
5. Extremely Conservative

Taiwan Crisis Response Policy Options

The U.S. President is under pressure to respond. The National Security Advisor has asked you to provide your recommendations to the President and Principal’s Committee on a set of options developed by the Deputies’ Committee earlier today. U.S. objectives remain to deter further escalation of the crisis and preserve the ability of the Taiwanese to defend their sovereignty. Long-term, she wants options for enhancing strategic stability in the region. Her team requests that you recommend six options based on the crisis response menu put together at the Deputies Committee meeting.

**NOTE**: when you are finished you should have only six boxes checked.

Which of the following diplomatic crisis options would you recommend?

- (Short-term Option 1) Meet with ambassadors from the region to coordinate public denouncements of Chinese actions
(Short-term Option 2) Demarche Chinese officials
(Long-term Option 3) Use regional forum to craft a convent that limits the use of military capabilities to avoid future gray zone flashpoints
(Long-term Option 4) Meet with Australian, Japanese, and Taiwanese officials in private to discuss response options to future crises

Which of the following security crisis options would you recommend?

- (Short-term Option 1) Escort Taiwanese commercial flights and maritime traffic to Kinmen
- (Short-term Option 2) Conduct a FONOP in the Taiwan Strait
- (Long-term Option 3) Increase foreign military sales to Taiwan
- (Long-term Option 4) Alter force posture to increase strike assets in INDOPACOM capable of ranging Taiwan in a crisis

Which of the following economic, development and/or humanitarian crisis options would you recommend?

- (Short-term Option 1) Have treasury officials call Chinese counterparts to signal economic risks
- (Short-term Option 2) Threaten targeted sanctions to PLA officials linked to the operation
- (Long-term Option 3) Provide economic assistance as a cover for helping Taiwan field additional sensors to detect gray zone incursions
- (Long-term Option 4) Explore reviving and expanding Trump era tariffs on Chinese activities including the fishing fleet and other economic sectors linked to maritime militia activity

**Post-Workshop Survey (same across all scenarios)**

After discussing policy options, how likely is a bipartisan policy response?

1. Almost Impossible
2. Unlikely
3. Chances are Even
4. Possible
5. Almost Certain

What is the largest barrier to achieving bipartisan consensus on the issue?

- Media
- Upcoming Election
- Internal Party Issues
- Public Opinion

What is your "big idea" for overcoming domestic divisions? What approach do you think actors could take to create a space for more consensus around the policy options?
Appendix F

Public Survey Questionnaires

The language has been kept in its original form with no content edits.

Bab al-Mandeb Public Survey Questionnaire

How would you self-identify in terms of the current U.S. political spectrum?

1. Extremely Liberal/Progressive
2. Left Leaning
3. Centrist
4. Right Leaning
5. Extremely Conservative

Of these, which do you consider the BIGGEST problem facing the United States today?

1. Violent Crime
2. Illegal Immigration
3. Climate Change
4. Racism
5. Economic Inequality
6. International Security

How do you view United States international involvement?

1. The U.S. should be more involved in the world
2. The U.S. should be less involved in the world
3. The U.S. should maintain current levels of involvement in the world

(Control Question) New York City and Houston are in what country?
1. China
2. Iran
3. United States
4. Venezuela

After Presentation of the scenario, how likely is a bipartisan policy response?
1. Almost Impossible
2. Unlikely
3. Chances are Even
4. Possible
5. Almost Certain

What is the largest barrier to achieving bipartisan consensus on the issue?
- Media
- Upcoming Election
- Internal Party Issues
- Public Opinion
- Other

Which of the following diplomatic crisis options would you support?
- U.S. representatives meeting with ambassadors from Europe and the region to coordinate public calls to restore freedom of navigation in the Bab al-Mandeb Strait
- U.S. representatives working with European partners to have China and Russia pressure Iran on weapons shipments to the Houthis
- The expansion of multi-lateral efforts to include coercive measures in an effort to broker a new truce in the Yemen civil war
- U.S. representatives engaging European partners on forming a new task force for ensuring freedom of navigation in the Red Sea

Which of the following security crisis options would you support?
- The U.S. repositioning Fifth Fleet assets to provide intelligence and expanded strike options to support re-establishing freedom of navigation
- The U.S. conducting a Freedom of Navigation Operations in the Red Sea to challenge the blockade
- The U.S. increasing foreign sales to Gulf States for air defenses and other military systems
- The U.S. altering force posture to increase strike assets long-term to respond to Iran's support to proxies in the region

Which of the following economic, development and/or humanitarian crisis options would you support?
- The U.S. government releasing some of its strategic oil reserve
- The U.S. organizing an energy summit to look at new infrastructure to avoid conflict-prone transit routes
• Accelerating green energy transition programs in the U.S.
• Expanding U.S. liquid natural gas exports and construct new pipelines

Migration Public Survey Questionnaire

How would you self-identify in terms of the current U.S. political spectrum?

1. Extremely Liberal/Progressive
2. Left Leaning
3. Centrist
4. Right Leaning
5. Extremely Conservative

Of these, which do you consider the BIGGEST problem facing the United States today?

1. Violent Crime
2. Illegal Immigration
3. Climate Change
4. Racism
5. Economic Inequality
6. International Security

How do you view United States international involvement?

1. The U.S. should be more involved in the world
2. The U.S. should be less involved in the world
3. The U.S. should maintain current levels of involvement in the world

(Control Question) New York City and Houston are in what country?

1. China
2. Iran
3. United States
4. Venezuela

After Presentation of the scenario, how likely is a bipartisan policy response?

1. Almost Impossible
2. Unlikely
3. Chances are Even
4. Possible
5. Almost Certain

What is the largest barrier to achieving bipartisan consensus on the issue?

• Media
• Upcoming Election
• Internal Party Issues
• Public Opinion
• Other

Which of the following diplomatic crisis options would you support?
• Senior U.S. political leaders engaging with regional heads and civil society organizations to find immediate solutions to curb migration as well as convene multiple regional and international bodies to address the surge
• The U.S. requests Mexico to open reception facilities for migrants
• The U.S. developing new bilateral agreements for rapidly returning migrants that do not meet asylum standards to both home and host countries
• The U.S. developing a regional compact to address migration and its root causes

Which of the following security crisis options would you support?
• Increasing Department of Homeland Security assets along the border
• The U.S. deploying military forces to the border for surveillance and providing options for care/feeding/repatriation of migrants
• Increasing the capacity of the asylum system to review cases and expand the legal immigration system
• Increasing the ability of the US government to deal with migration-related issues

Which of the following economic, development and/or humanitarian crisis options would you support?
• The U.S. establishing temporary staging areas along the border to provide basic care and feeding while reviewing asylum claims and repatriating migrants
• The U.S. establishing a task force to identify and attack illicit gains from migration
• The U.S. providing grants to local U.S. communities for job training linked to new migration surges
• The U.S. providing increased development assistance linked to job creation in Central America

**Taiwan Public Survey Questionnaire**

How would you self-identify in terms of the current U.S. political spectrum?
1. Extremely Liberal/Progressive
2. Left Leaning
3. Centrist
4. Right Leaning
5. Extremely Conservative

Of these, which do you consider the BIGGEST problem facing the United States today?
1. Violent Crime
2. Illegal Immigration
3. Climate Change
4. Racism
5. Economic Inequality
6. International Security
How do you view United States international involvement?
   1. The U.S. should be more involved in the world
   2. The U.S. should be less involved in the world
   3. The U.S. should maintain current levels of involvement in the world

(Control Question) New York City and Houston are in what country?
   1. China
   2. Iran
   3. United States
   4. Venezuela

After Presentation of the scenario, how likely is a bipartisan policy response?
   1. Almost Impossible
   2. Unlikely
   3. Chances are Even
   4. Possible
   5. Almost Certain

What is the largest barrier to achieving bipartisan consensus on the issue?
   ▪ Media
   ▪ Upcoming Election
   ▪ Internal Party Issues
   ▪ Public Opinion
   ▪ Other

Which of the following diplomatic crisis options would you support?
   ▪ U.S. leaders meeting with ambassadors from the region to coordinate public denouncements of Chinese actions
   ▪ The U.S. lodging official complaints with Chinese officials
   ▪ The U.S. using regional forum to craft a convent that limits the use of military capabilities
   ▪ U.S. leaders meeting with Australian, Japanese, and Taiwanese officials in private to discuss response options to future crises

Which of the following security crisis options would you support?
   ▪ The U.S. escorting Taiwanese commercial flights and maritime traffic to Kinmen
   ▪ The U.S. conducting a Freedom of Navigation Operation in the Taiwan Strait
   ▪ The U.S. increasing foreign military sales to Taiwan
   ▪ The U.S. altering force posture to increase strike assets in INDOPACOM (U.S. Indo-Pacific Command) capable of assisting Taiwan in a crisis

Which of the following economic, development and/or humanitarian crisis options would you support?
   ▪ U.S. treasury officials calling Chinese counterparts to signal economic risks
   ▪ The U.S. threatening targeted sanctions to PLA officials linked to the operation
• The U.S. providing economic assistance as a cover for helping Taiwan field additional sensors to detect gray zone incursions
• The U.S. exploring the revitalization and expansion of Trump era tariffs on Chinese activities including the fishing fleet and other economic sectors linked to maritime militia activity
Endnotes


14 Ibid., 256–71.


30 Zenko, “Iran’s Nuclear Program.”
The 2002 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) in Iraq erroneously alleged that the country was operating continuing programs for the manufacturing of WMDs. This represented a failure in national intelligence and led to speculation on whether intelligence had been intentionally falsified in justifying the extent of U.S. intervention in Iraq. Any notion of uncertainty within the NIE which suggested the development of nuclear programs by the Iraqi government was only presented in the footnotes, 59 pages into the report. As a result, both National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and President George W. Bush were allegedly unaware of any concerns over the accuracy of the intelligence.


Pew Research Center, *Majority of Americans Confident in Biden’s Handling of Foreign Policy*.


Rural-urban divides are common in most countries, though other types of divisions can and do exist, especially as a result of history, including the so-called “black belt” in the southern United States, Eastern versus Western Germany, and the legacy of colonial powers with differing goals and governance approaches. From @latifnasser: “The US election is tomorrow. If you, like me, are tired of horse-race-style reporting, and need to zoom out, I wanna tell you a story. It’s about an ancient force influencing the election. And, as a bonus, it’ll give you an Easter egg to watch for as the returns come in. THREAD,” Latif Nasser, Twitter Post, November 2, 2020, 10:36 a.m., https://twitter.com/latifnasser/status/1323333293467525126?s=20; and Elizabeth A. Dobis et al., *Rural America at a Glance: 2021 Edition* (Washington, DC: Economic Research Service, November 2021), https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=102575.


46 This text was used to establish the scenario for public survey participants between November 16–18, 2021 (Appendix F). For a longer version used by workshop participants on November 3, 2021, see Appendix B.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 “Mapping the Future of U.S. China Policy,” CSIS.

50 Ibid.