



Foreign Policy Questions for the Candidates

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Presumably presidential debates have some value. But, truthfully, if you don't know what Donald Trump, president for the last, very painful, four years, and Joe Biden, in public life for a terrifying 47 years, stand for, you should not be voting. You might find it difficult to choose between the two – seriously, this is the best America can offer? – but their weaknesses and infirmities long have been on display for all to see.

However, the presidential clashes could act as an educational experience for Americans. At least, if journalists, analysts, voters, and candidates asked better questions.

Most people at least have a general sense about the economy. However, for many of them international issues are mysterious, involving esoteric controversies about bizarre places that not only seem but are far, far away. Unfortunately, distant doesn't mean cheap. Washington's Mideast misadventures have cost the U.S. thousands of lives and trillions of dollars, while exacerbating other foreign problems – creating chaos, spreading instability, devastating societies, fomenting sectarianism, creating ISIS, empowering Iran, entangling America. The next time someone wants to ignore what Uncle Sam does around the world, he or she should remember that Washington is filled with people determined to play global social engineer with other people's lives and money.

What should we insist the presidential candidates tell us? I have a few suggestions. People across America should add their own.

1. What should be the principal objective of US foreign policy? Should Washington focus on protecting America – its territory, population, prosperity, and constitutional liberties? Or should policymakers see themselves as global Vestal Virgins, anointed from on-high and responsible for socially re-engineering the entire globe? Is it Americans' responsibility to solve every problem, adjust every behavior, punish every transgression, and fix every mistake? Is there anything anywhere which is not Washington's responsibility?
2. When should the US go to war? Do you want to spend your term wandering the globe bombing, invading, and occupying nations? Is it proper to loose the dogs of war to enhance Washington's influence, oust an unfriendly dictator, gain trade benefits, spread democracy, and remake the world into something wonderful and glorious? Or only in America's defense and pursuit of other truly vital interests?
3. Was Iraq a moral and prudent war? Were the costs – thousands of dead Americans, tens of thousands of wounded Americans, hundreds of thousands of dead Iraqis, millions of

displaced Iraqis, trillions of dollars spent – worth the benefits? If so, could you detail those gains? Were there any positives for the US beyond illustrating the incapacity, incompetence, and incoherence of "the Blob," the country's perpetually interventionist foreign policy establishment?

4. Would your administration continue to rely on policymakers who have failed at every turn? Would you consult or employ officials, analysts, and journalists who promoted the Iraq war, thereby convulsing the Middle East, destabilizing Iraq's neighbors, loosing ISIS, strengthening Iran, and destroying minority religious communities? Would you take advice from people who orchestrated the so-far nearly 20-year war in Afghanistan and promoted the destruction of Libya, approaching its tenth year of civil war? Would you treat seriously the pronouncements of someone who advocated underwriting the totalitarian Saudi regime's aggressive war against Yemen, which has strengthened al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, turned a long-running internal feud into an international sectarian conflict, enhanced Tehran's influence, and created a humanitarian catastrophe? If not, would you pledge to bar such people from coming within a hundred yard of any federal building or facility, or any other location where you were meeting or speaking?
5. Do you believe that the Constitution creates a republic or an elective dictatorship? Can the president wander the globe bombing, invading, and occupying nations on his or her authority alone, or is congressional approval required? Do you hope to get away with unilateral war-making even if congressional approval is theoretically required?
6. Should legislators fulfill their legal responsibilities and insist that presidents follow the Constitution in seeking congressional approval for military action? Should members of Congress hold presidents accountable for starting wars on their own? Would you insist that they stop evading their obligations and act? Or would you encourage them to continue allowing presidents to proceed, after which members of Congress applaud if things go well and complain if the fight goes badly?
7. Do you believe the US should impose its will on other nations by wrecking their economies and starving their peoples through use of sanctions? Should Washington conscript every other nation on earth, including nominal friends and allies, by threatening to destroy their industries and undermine their economies if they insist on following their own policies? Should the American government attempt to jail anyone anywhere around the globe who disobeys US dictates?
8. What makes an interest "vital"? Does it make sense to label virtually everything – the latest coup attempt in Burkina Faso or Fiji, the latest human rights abuse in Chad or Tajikistan, and most any other event or rhetoric of any sort anywhere – as threatening "vital" American interests? Is there any country on earth in which America does not have a vital interest? Advocates of endless war claim that Central Asia, the Middle East, the Balkans, North Africa, the Horn of Africa, all of Asia, and all of Europe require permanent bases and ever-growing garrisons. Is it possible to stop intervening in any of those countries? Even one of them? If so, please name it.
9. Are alliances truly forever, no matter how much circumstances change? Do you, like most every other US official, reflexively insist that security commitments today are "more important than ever" even if allies are wealthy and enemies have disappeared?

Must these alliances be maintained even after Jesus returns and the lion lies down with the lamb? What if the lion lies down with two lambs?

10. Is it America's destiny to bankrupt itself protecting prosperous and populous allies which prefer not to waste money defending themselves? Do you join other Washington policymakers in making the nonsensical claim that the way to get foreign defense dependents to do more is for America to spend even more on their security and reassure them that the US will be there no matter how little they do for themselves? Would it be okay with you if they completely disarmed, putting all responsibility for their defense on America?
11. Can you ever imagine deciding that responsibility for another nation's defense belongs to its people and not Americans? Is there a circumstance under which the US should be prepared to answer "no" when a foreign government requests money and troops? Are there any nations which are not Washington's responsibility to defend?
12. Should the US revive the Cold War with Moscow, confronting a nuclear-armed power over Georgia and Ukraine, which spent hundreds of years as part of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, and which the Putin government views as essential to its border security? Would you accept either Russia or China acting similarly in the Western Hemisphere – promoting the overthrow of the Canadian and Mexican governments and inviting them to join a hostile military alliance?
13. Are you prepared to fight a new cold war or a hot one with China? Do you believe that Beijing poses a military threat to America – its territory, population, or liberties? Are you prepared for war with a nuclear-armed power to preserve American influence up to China's border? Would you accept Chinese military forces operating along the Eastern seaboard, in the Caribbean, and along the Mexican and Canadian borders? Are you prepared to go to war over disputed Asian territories such as Scarborough Shoal and the Senkaku Islands?
14. Do you believe that the US should keep fighting in Afghanistan until something wonderful happens, and how would you define what that something wonderful entailed? Is it America's sacred duty to use the military to bring democracy to this part of Central Asia, where such a government has never existed before? Is there any limit to the lives that should be sacrificed for, money that should be wasted on, and time that should be devoted to the task? If 20 years is not enough, how about 40? Or 60? Or should Washington aspire to spend a full century at war in Afghanistan?
15. Are you committed to treating the Korean peninsula today as if it was 1953 and still required Washington for its defense? Or would you turn responsibility over to South Korea, which has vastly outstripped North Korea on every important measure of power? Would you build on the Trump administration's summitry with North Korea by establishing diplomatic relations and encouraging regular contact? Would you be prepared to accept the reality that the North is a nuclear power and push for meaningful arms control in return for sanctions relief? Or do you believe it is America's duty to prepare to fight a nuclear war growing out of the 75-year-old Korean face-off?

16. Do you believe the US should have gotten involved in the bitter, multi-sided Syrian civil war filled with murderous, authoritarian, hostile combatants? If so, have you had a mental checkup recently? Do you support Washington's illegal military occupation to steal Syrian oil? Do you back US policy, which supports *the local al-Qaeda affiliate* against the Syrian government? Do you believe that 600 Americans can achieve Washington's objectives to oust President Bashar al-Assad, establish democracy in Syria, confront Russia and Iran, and separate the Turkish military and Kurdish militias? Do any of these objectives warrant going to war in a country of minimal security relevance to America? If you believe so, please explain why. Would you hire any officials who had advocated such a nonsensical position and pushed for American military intervention in Syria?
17. Should America shape its policy in the Middle East to advance America's interests? Or should it be based, as during the Trump administration, on the desires and whims of the Saudi and Israeli governments? Should the US get in the middle of the Sunni-Shia struggle if Riyadh buys more planes and bombs, thereby further enriching the military industrial complex? Should American taxpayers continue to fund the oppressive al-Sisi government in Egypt, which has killed hundreds and jailed tens of thousands of people to stay in power? Should Washington remain silent at the terrible human rights violations by its allies, not just Saudi Arabia and Egypt, but also Turkey, Bahrain, and United Arab Emirates?
18. Do you, despite centuries of human experience, assume that all foreigners are spineless wimps who will always yield to US demands, no matter how ridiculous, expansive, and unreasonable? Is it the basic moral obligation of every foreigner in every nation to yield to Washington's dictates? Is Washington entitled to sanction, bomb, invade, and occupy any nation that refuses to comply? Would you treat resistance to American hegemony as a double offense warranting an extra bombing raid.?
19. Would you continue the Trump administration policy of ending nuclear arms control agreements? Would you support the Obama and Trump administration plans for a massive modernization and expansion of the US arsenal, likely triggering a new arms race? If matched by Moscow and ultimately Beijing, do you believe Americans would be safer?
20. Have you looked at the latest Congressional Budget Office estimates, which show that the US government is essentially bankrupt? How should Washington finance its continued attempt to maintain a de facto global empire? Should America borrow whatever is necessary at whatever cost is required? Should domestic spending be slashed and taxes be hiked in order to continuing funding the globe's most dispersed, expansive, sophisticated, and expensive military? Or should policymakers make choices, set priorities, and reduce responsibilities? And stop funding a military developed to dominate the world rather than defend America?
21. Are you prepared to accept the fact that the world will always be a messy place? Or do you believe in treating every conflict, challenge, problem, disturbance, instability, dispute, uncertainty, and imperfection as a threat to vital American interests? Would you continue present policy of taking the Monroe Doctrine international, meaning that the US, and only the US, is authorized to intervene anywhere and everywhere on earth? Or would you seek to develop the "humble foreign policy" that George W. Bush initially

advocated, before making what most international scholars believe to be America's most serious foreign policy blunder in decades by invading Iraq?

22. Would you work for peace even if that means the US no longer dominates the world? Foreign governments no longer treat American officials as de facto royalty? And you no longer are routinely termed the world's most powerful person? Would you break with your predecessors and put the interests of the American people first by seeking peace?

Wednesday's debate is off, with the president's refusal to go virtual. Given the character of the first one, we won't be missing much. However, the candidates should answer questions from the rest of us. Including about international affairs.

We deserve to know whether they would continue to turn important foreign policy decisions over to domestic interests, foreign dictators, established elites, and others who have dominated US decision-making in recent years. Whether they would continue to play global social engineer, attempting to make the world into America's image irrespective of the cost. Whether they would start setting priorities, both among competing foreign interests, and with domestic challenges as well. And, finally, whether they would continue wasting American lives and money on more idiotic endless wars.

What say ye, President Trump, Vice President Pence, Vice President Biden, and Senator Harris?

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