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## Commentary: U.S. needs robust debate on foreign policy choices

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In October, America's longest war, the war in Afghanistan, will enter its 16th year. With American troops fighting not only in Afghanistan, but in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and elsewhere, foreign policy should be a major topic of discussion during the Democratic National Convention and overall this election year. Unfortunately, neither Hillary Clinton nor Donald Trump advocate a foreign policy that the American people want.

Trump can certainly be credited with shaking up the foreign policy debate during the primary season. Simply by expressing ideas that differ from Republican foreign policy dogma - for example, that the Iraq war was a mistake - he gave voice to the frustration many voters feel toward the elites that make U.S. foreign policy. Indeed, Trump's statements on the Iraq war, NATO, and Russia implied to some that he might fire the establishment and pursue a less interventionist foreign policy.

Appearances are deceiving. While Trump's proposals are occasionally restrained, they are more often deranged. From promises to send 30,000 U.S. troops to fight ISIS - quickly retracted - to pledges to seize Middle Eastern oil reserves, to calls for indiscriminate bombing of suspected terrorist sites, which would also kill innocent civilians, many of his foreign policy pronouncements have illustrated a bellicose and militaristic worldview. Voters should be worried: Trump's approach to foreign policy is incoherent at best, and dangerous at worst.

Troublingly, it's not clear that Clinton's is much better. True, she has substantial experience in foreign affairs, particularly her time as secretary of state. But Clinton has a history of terrible foreign policy decisions. She not only backed the 2003 war in Iraq, but was the chief architect of the 2011 campaign to overthrow Libya's Moammar Gadhafi, a decision that has produced a long-running civil war in that country.

Unfortunately, Clinton's proposals suggest that she has learned nothing from these mistakes. She continues to call for the creation of a "safe space" or no-fly zone inside Syria, a decision that could escalate into imposing regime change, as it did in Libya, or even bring U.S. forces into direct conflict with Russia. More broadly, she advocates more intervention around the world, when the American people want to focus on problems closer to home.

Clinton's approach - the idea that America must meddle in every global dispute - has already been tried, and has proven costly, dangerous and unnecessary.

For example, America's security threats today are far lower than during the majority of the Cold War, and yet we spend more on the military. In fact, military spending is 36 percent higher in real terms than in 2000. And this doesn't count the human costs: In the last 15 years alone, nearly 7,000 U.S. soldiers have been killed, 52,000 have been wounded in action, and close to a million veterans have registered disability claims.

Unsurprisingly, the American people want a different approach. When asked, more than half of Americans say they don't want the United States to take the lead in solving the world's problems, while 57 percent believe that we should let other countries deal with their own issues. Indeed, when asked more generally about the scope of U.S. foreign policy, 41 percent of Americans think the United States does too much; only 27 percent agrees with Clinton that the United States does too little.

A more restrained foreign policy would not only be more popular, but also cheaper and safer. It would avoid involvement in distant conflicts that do not threaten American interests. Restraint-oriented military reforms would strengthen our armed forces, while allowing cuts in defense spending of up to 25 percent.

Even President Obama agrees. As he told the Atlantic Monthly's Jeffrey Goldberg in April: "Almost every great world power has succumbed" to overextension. "What I think is not smart," he said, "is the idea that every time there is a problem, we send in our military to impose order. We just can't do that." While Obama has presided over some foreign policy disasters, he kept us out of unnecessary conflicts in Syria and Ukraine, and negotiated an effective nuclear deal with Iran.

Unfortunately, neither Clinton nor Trump seems inclined to follow his example. Both have blasted his relative caution, and favor instead a more interventionist foreign policy.

In today's world, terrorists and other nonstate actors, troublesome allies, a belligerent Russia, and a rising China all complicate U.S. foreign policy. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have no clear end in sight, and there are seemingly endless calls for us to become embroiled in new ones. There is an urgent need for a robust debate on America's foreign policy choices.

As we head toward November's general election, both candidates should pay closer attention to what Americans actually want: a foreign policy that doesn't try to solve every global problem.

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