

Terrorism: How Should We Respond?

What follows is a framework of policy “Options” that frame the current debate in the United States concerning terrorism. They are designed to help you think about a range of possible policy options and the ramifications of each. The four options provided are not intended as a menu of choices. Rather, they are framed in stark terms to highlight very different policy approaches. Each alternative includes a set of policies concerning terrorism, some arguments in support of the position, and some criticisms of it. These are designed to help you think carefully about the trade-offs of each.

After you have considered each of the options presented, think about your concerns and values and deliberate with your peers on the strengths and challenges of each of the options presented. Then you are encouraged to develop your own Option 5, an option that reflects your own views and concerns. You may want to borrow heavily from one of the options presented, combine ideas from several, or take a new approach altogether. As you frame your Option 5, think about the following questions:

- What U.S. interests are at stake in this issue?
- What values and interests should guide U.S. policy toward terrorism?
- What do you think our long term goals should be?
- What will this mean for U.S. policy in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and in other parts of the world in the coming months?
- What will this mean for U.S. domestic policy?
- What are the pros and cons of the option you are proposing?

Make your voice heard

Finally, you are encouraged to participate in an online ballot focused on this issue. “Terrorism: How Should We Respond?” is available from the Ballots section of the Choices web site at www.choices.edu/resources/ballots.php. A ballot on the larger question of the U.S role in the world is also available. Reports on student views are developed periodically.

You can find contact information for the White House at www.whitehouse.gov/contact/ and your U.S. Senators and Representatives at thomas.loc.gov/. Contact information for candidates for public office is available from www.vote-smart.org.

“Terrorism: How should we respond?” is a Teaching with the News online resource published by the Choices Program at Brown University. Online resources are updated frequently. A lesson plan, extension activities and additional web links are available from the Resources section of the Choices Program web site—www.choices.edu/resources

Copyright - Choices Program, Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University All rights reserved. Permission is granted to photocopy for classroom use with appropriate credit given.

This material is adapted from *Responding to Terrorism: Challenges for Democracy*, a one-week curriculum unit developed by the Choices for the 21st Century Education Program, Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University. A full description of *Responding to Terrorism: Challenges for Democracy* is available online from Resources on the Choices Program web site.

Option 1: Direct an Expanded Assault on Terrorism

The United States cannot tolerate acts of terrorism, those who perpetrate them, or those nations who harbor terrorists. As the sole remaining superpower, we have no choice but to take on the job of rooting out terrorism wherever it exists. It is our responsibility and duty to protect ourselves and make the world safe from terrorists. The war on terrorism is a worldwide struggle and we must move forward with a worldwide offensive to combat it until all who threaten peace and security are destroyed. Although it is helpful to have the cooperation of other nations, we must be prepared to fight terrorism—alone if necessary—wherever and whenever it threatens. Nothing less than our own freedom is at stake.

What should we do?

- We should take the war on terrorism to any nation that harbors international terrorists.
- We should devote more of our resources to our military forces.
- We should increase our intelligence capacity.
- International agreements and treaties, like the Geneva Conventions, should not be allowed to hinder our pursuit of terrorists.
- We should encourage and work with any indigenous forces willing to fight a terrorist group and the government that supports it.

Supporting Arguments

- Acting alone when necessary avoids the difficulties that arise from seeking cooperation with other nations that have different political interests and constraints.
- The only way to avert imminent threats to our security is to act preemptively.
- By engaging indigenous forces to fight terrorist groups and their government sponsors, as we did in Afghanistan, we can save American lives.
- Being free of the bureaucracy and political constraints of multinational decision making will allow us to respond more quickly where and when we need to.

Concerns and Tradeoffs

- As the U.S. expands the war on terrorism under its own leadership and on its own terms, anti-American sentiment in other countries will only increase, fueling further terrorism.
- It will require the help of many nations to break up the decentralized network of terrorist cells that currently exists around the world. If we act without regard for international law, we will lose international support.
- If the U.S. takes a go-it-alone approach to defining and rooting out terrorism around the world, flexing U.S. military might unilaterally, we will isolate ourselves from the international community.
- Getting involved with indigenous forces may be expedient at the outset but the risk is too great that, after the victory, we will be dragged into supporting and protecting groups that we really do not approve of or that we cannot trust.
- Al Qaeda is the central threat to U.S. security. We can't afford to waste our resources going after countries that don't pose an immediate threat to the United States.
- This response fails to address the underlying causes of terrorism, including a deep-seated resentment of the United States, and will instead only lead to a continuing cycle of violence and more deaths of innocent people.
- Military action overseas diverts resources needed for protection here at home.
- Using our military might as a response to terrorism is bound to result in the deaths of innocent civilians. Our country must respond to terrorism in ways that preserve our national ethics and democratic traditions.

Option 2: Support UN Leadership to Fight Terrorism

Terrorism is a global, not a national, problem. Today our security and the security of the rest of the civilized world depend upon our ability to work together to address this universal threat. We must recognize the UN as the entity with the legitimacy to develop and maintain a long-term, truly international effort to control and eventually wipe out terrorism worldwide. We must play a leadership role in strengthening the effectiveness of the UN on security matters and offer our military, intelligence, and economic support to a UN-led effort to eradicate terrorist cells wherever they are found. We must stand with the world community against lawless terror.

What should we do?

- We should lead efforts to strengthen the hand of the UN on security matters. This includes taking steps to turn over leadership in post-war Iraq to the UN.
- We should debate any response to future terrorist acts against the United States before the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council and abide by the Council's decisions.
- We should become a member of the International Criminal Court and prosecute international terrorists there.
- We should carefully follow all existing treaties (like the Geneva Conventions), and we should work with the UN to strengthen the conventions limiting nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons.

Supporting Arguments

- International cooperation brings together the financial, diplomatic, and intelligence tools necessary to address international terrorism.
- Relations with our traditional allies were severely strained when we initiated the war with Iraq without UN approval. We cannot afford to isolate ourselves further from the international community.
- Cooperating as a partner with other nations through the UN will create a truly international response to terrorism, one that reflects the interests and needs of all of the international community, and denies hiding places to terrorists anywhere.
- The UN is only as strong as its member states. In order to make the UN effective as an international organization it must have the full support of the United States.
- The members of the international community will not continue to collaborate unless the decision-making takes all perspectives and interests into account. This will only happen if leadership is shared.

Concerns and Tradeoffs

- When U.S. interests are threatened—here or abroad—we have a right to do what is necessary to defend ourselves, with or without the support of other nations and international organizations.
- Any international coalition will be ineffective without strong U.S. leadership. For that leadership to be effective, we must not be constrained by others in either the nature or the timing of our response.
- The UN already has conventions prohibiting terrorism and biological weapons and has been unable to enforce them. Why will the UN be any more effective now?
- The UN is too slow, too weak, and too indecisive to make any real difference. Giving the institution more power is at best a long-term proposition. It won't do anything for the terrorist threat today.
- While an international effort may be necessary to correctly identify the perpetrators of terrorism and bring them to justice, terrorism will not end until we address its root causes.
- Accommodating other nations' interests in a UN campaign against international terrorism will lead us to compromise our nation's values and force us to support positions abroad that we do not agree with.
- If we pledge to join with the UN in an all-out campaign against international terrorism, we may be forced to spend our own resources on international initiatives that we may not fully approve of at the expense of defending ourselves at home.

Option 3: Defend Our Homeland

The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 brought a new message to Americans. We have been attacked on our own homeland, and we feel a vulnerability not felt in more than fifty years. Our high-profile foreign policy programs have only bred resentment against us and made us enemies who are intent on doing us harm. The time has come to lower our foreign policy profile, get ourselves out of the sights of terrorists, and build up our national defenses. While civil liberties are important to Americans, we must recognize that we are in a new world. The government must be allowed to take new steps to protect our security.

What should we do?

- We should scale back our foreign involvement by cutting foreign aid programs and reducing our military presence abroad—especially in the Middle East.
- We should build up our intelligence capacity with a focus on understanding the threats that face us here at home.
- We should launch a coordinated national effort to develop defenses against the new threats that face us—biological, chemical, or nuclear attacks.
- We should establish a national identity card, tighten immigration laws, closely watch high-risk ethnic groups, and allow broader monitoring of communications in order to keep tabs on potential terrorists.

Supporting Arguments

- We live in a world where a small handful of angry individuals can wreak havoc using a small amount of weapons-grade biological or chemical material or a “dirty bomb” in a suitcase. Being prepared for such attacks will save American lives.
- By limiting any response only to those who directly threaten us, we will avoid needlessly drawing the wrath of a wider circle of terrorist organizations.
- Taking sides in the battles of other nations (such as Israel’s struggles with Hezbollah) only increases our own vulnerability by drawing the attention of a wider circle of terrorists. The less we are involved in the affairs of other nations, the more secure we will be.
- Resources saved from international involvement can be redirected to promote enhanced security at home.

Concerns and Tradeoffs

- Terrorism is globalized. It will be impossible to get a full picture of the terrorist threats facing us if we do not bring our intelligence resources together with those of the rest of the world. That integration of intelligence capacity will not happen if we withdraw from the international community.
- Withdrawing from the international community will not protect us from possible attack. As long as there are haves and have-nots in the world, we will remain a target for terrorism. There is nowhere to hide.
- As we have already seen, the United States cannot defend itself against all possible means that terrorists have at their disposal. Our only practical and moral choice is to address the root causes of international terrorism.
- A determination to address our vulnerability to international terrorism solely with civil defense measures at home will inevitably lead to compromising the civil liberties on which our nation was founded. At that point, what are we protecting?
- The threats to our security are not only here at home. We must be prepared to act preemptively in other regions of the world to stop attacks before they happen.
- The terrorist threat is everywhere. It is better to fight terrorism on foreign soil than to have it come again to our own shores.
- If we are going to ensure the continuing flow of oil from the Middle East, we must maintain our military presence in the region. We cannot assume that the international community will do this for us.

Option 4: Address the Underlying Causes of Terrorism

Terrorism is a crime against humanity and cannot be tolerated. However, further military action will only perpetuate the cycle of violence. We must abandon any plans for further military action and join with others to address the deeper issues underlying terrorism. Terrorism feeds on the frustrations of some of the world's most disadvantaged peoples. We must join with the developed world to devote our attention and our resources to launching a targeted "Marshall Plan" that addresses the underlying causes of terrorism. We must also examine our own policies in many parts of the world to see that we are not inflaming long-standing local and regional conflicts, fueling discontent, and creating a breeding ground for anti-American sentiment.

What should we do?

- We should provide more resources in support of the UN's reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. We should end our military operation in Iraq, turn control of the reconstruction effort over to the UN, and provide whatever aid is necessary to ensure a successful transition to self-rule and a peacetime economy in Iraq.
- We should refocus our funding priorities to improve the quality of life of disadvantaged populations around the world.
- We should work for just resolutions to long-term political conflicts (such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) that provide breeding grounds for terrorism.
- We should end our support of regimes that do not support human rights and democratic principles, and affirm our commitment to the Geneva Conventions and international law.

Supporting Arguments

- If we do not address the underlying causes of terrorism—including poverty, injustice, powerlessness, hatred, and in some cases U.S. policy—we risk feeding anti-American rage and creating new recruits to terrorist networks. We have no choice.
- Taking a leadership role in addressing the humanitarian needs of populations in failing states will reduce animosity toward the United States. This is not only a humanitarian issue; it has become a security issue as well.
- In order to be a credible force in addressing terrorism, we must demonstrate that we understand the causes of terrorism and are committed to taking action to address them.
- By addressing the underlying causes of terrorism, we will be able to avoid putting our civil liberties at risk from repressive homeland security measures.

Concerns and Tradeoffs

- Addressing the underlying causes of terrorism will take time. Meanwhile we remain vulnerable to more terrorist attacks. Homeland security can only do so much. We have to act now to stop these terrorist attacks at their source.
- Neither the United States nor the international community has the resources to address all of the underlying causes of terrorism.
- We can not afford to redirect so much of our budget to development efforts overseas at a time when those resources are needed to build up our defenses here at home.
- If we focus our efforts on long-term solutions, we will be allowing terrorists to commit horrible crimes without immediate consequences. This will invite additional attacks both at home and abroad.
- Terrorists are angry people who hate the United States and the West for ideological and political reasons. The origins of terrorism have little to do with perceived economic and social injustice.
- There will always be hatred. There will always be violence. No amount of foreign aid will change this. We have no real control over anything but our own security.