

SCUSA 60 THEME:
“MEASURING PROGRESS AND DEFINING NEW CHALLENGES”

DOMESTIC SOURCES OF INFLUENCE ON FOREIGN POLICY

The common axiom that politics ends at the water’s edge may no longer hold water. The theme of SCUSA 60 essentially asks us to contemplate how the United States can create foreign policy options to navigate a myriad of global challenges while maintaining allegiance to core democratic values. As political scientist Bruce Jentleson has noted, the choices are difficult, and foreign policy decisions frequently require trade-offs that sacrifice US principles in the pursuit of peace, power, and prosperity. The foreign policy decisions that US policy makers must make every day cover an incredibly wide range of states, regions, and issues, yet one constant remains: the domestic policy making setting. In this setting, there are a number of critical sources of influence that impact US foreign policy making including public opinion, the media, interest groups, the electoral process, the military-industrial complex, resource allocation, the inter-agency process, and perhaps most importantly, the Constitution itself. Our task is to evaluate the most significant of these influences and incorporate them into the broader foreign policy issues under consideration for this conference. Without taking these domestic sources of influence into consideration when selecting a foreign policy option, the implementation phase could prove disastrous when a consensus cannot be reached, resources cannot be allocated, there is a public outcry, or the social and political costs are deemed too high. Ultimately, the seemingly endless domestic influences that must be considered when making foreign policy decisions are emblematic of the broader perspective that the making of foreign policy in a liberal, representative democracy is full of tension.

The natural place to start when evaluating the tension inherent with foreign policy making in the US is the guiding document of the country: the Constitution. Contentious and deliberative by design, the Constitution was written so that no one actor could dominate the policy making process. This was particularly true of foreign policy, where although the President was to serve as the head of state and commander in chief of the military, it was envisioned that he would have no forces to command unless the Congress declared war and budgeted resources. Given the period in which it was written, this rather simple and straight-forward power sharing relationship made sense, but the world has undergone radical changes that the founding fathers were unable to forecast. More importantly, starting with the Cold War presidents, this relationship has come under fire from the executive branch. Over the past 60 years of U.S. History, Presidents have attempted to adjust to an increasingly dangerous world, compounded by the threat of nuclear war, and today, such compound threats as WMD proliferation in the hands of terrorists organizations of a transnational or even global operational reach, in ways that seemingly usurp power from the Congress with regard to the use of force and deployment of the military. Along the way, it has become the norm that the president would enjoy a significant amount of latitude with regard to foreign policy decisions, but that assumption has recently come under intense fire from Congress as the death toll mounts in Iraq and the American public is largely against maintaining the current troop level in that country. There are countless questions that arise from the current debate.

Today, does the Constitution truly maintain the congressional-presidential foreign policy sharing as envisioned at its inception? Should it? Or, is this framework outdated and the nature of the international community and its associated threats such that the President should not be constrained by its original assumptions? Has Congress abdicated its responsibilities in foreign policy matters, choosing instead to criticize the President when policy decisions they initially supported start to suffer setbacks? Lastly, could one reasonably argue that the Constitution is having its intended effect as Congress and the President quarrel over the way ahead in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and an increasingly recalcitrant Russia?

Another political phenomenon to consider when debating the domestic sources of influence on foreign policy is the impact of the American national electoral process whereby foreign policy issues become hotly contested election issues. In one sense, the projection of foreign policy issues onto the national stage as candidates vie for votes is positive. Seemingly, congressional and presidential candidates are forced to reveal their stances on issues critical to American national security so that the American public can vote for the politician best suited to lead the country. Unfortunately, we often find that the issues are partisanized; candidates do not consistently reveal their policy preferences, partisan politics overtake the merits of the issue, and, ultimately, it often becomes a personality, rather than policy debate. Again, the debate over the Iraq War serves as an example of this phenomenon. Consider the 2006 congressional elections in which the Democrats seized power in both chambers of congress. Certainly, there were a number of issues at stake, but the topic that most polarized the electorate was the Iraq War. The change in party leadership did little to alter the United States policies in Iraq. Why? Two years later and the Iraq War is no longer the voter's number one issue. The ailing economy has taken center stage as the primary topic of political discourse and campaigning. With the debate on the war muted, what can we expect from the next administration? Furthermore, considering the costs of the Troubled Asset Relief Program, entitlement programs, and the prospect of higher unemployment, can the nation afford to continue an engaged foreign policy stance? More importantly, in light of the economic challenges, should the United States add to the national debt by leading as the world's hegemon?

Tied closely to the electoral process in the US is the role of public opinion. Interestingly, it seems as if political scientists are divided about the quality of public opinion, particularly in the realm of foreign policy. Questions abound with regard to the consistency, merit, and place of public opinion when making foreign policy decisions. Is the general public qualified to dictate foreign policy? Do Americans follow the news closely enough to make an educated decision? When clamoring for a withdrawal of US forces in Iraq, does the public appreciate the regional risks? Probably more important than the task of ascertaining the worth of public opinion is the normative task of determining whether, despite its often questionable quality, public opinion should matter. This latter question is particularly important in a democracy that proclaims to be a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. This conflict between ideals and efficacy comes into sharp focus as the majority of Americans favor a drawdown in Iraq, yet President Bush remains resolute in both purpose and means, and Congress

appears paralyzed by partisan politics. Further, when evaluating public opinion, what is the role of the media and political elites in shaping it?

Given the power of the memory of the September 11th terrorist attacks, and the frequency with which it is invoked, this roundtable must also consider the true meaning and significance of those attacks. 9/11 has forever dismissed the notion that oceans will protect the US and the only viable threat is from states. There is now a clear recognition that national security must include the protection of US territory and citizens from all manners of threat, to include terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, cyber warfare, and the traditional state-based enemy. Following the September 11th attacks, the country seemed willing to sacrifice some personal liberties in the pursuit of collective security and Congress and the president responded with the Patriot Act. Over 300 pages long, the Patriot Act, which grants the executive branch much more leeway with regard to wiretapping, warrants, and surveillance initiatives, has come under fire as American citizens and civil liberties interest groups question its necessity and legitimacy. The question remains as to how far the government should go to protect its citizens. How much should the government infringe upon civil liberties to enhance security? Should those accused of terrorist activities have absolutely none of the due process of law held dear by Americans? What if the accused are American citizens? Ultimately, is the suspension or reinterpretation of civil liberties in the name of national security a slippery slope and should we be sensitive to process as well as outcome?

A final consideration to ponder in the debate over the domestic sources of influence on foreign policy is the role of institutions and the nature of the interagency process in policy making. Seemingly, the traditional diplomatic tools of foreign policy have been replaced by an over-reliance on the military. Even when the task at hand goes beyond the military's traditional role, as in Iraq, other government actors seem to be missing from the equation. What does one make of General Petraeus serving as the face of Iraq war policy? Is there a danger when top generals become more than advisors and become policy makers? Where are the president's other advisors and policy makers? Should Congress do more to balance the burden sharing? Is it time for the State Department to once again assume its position as a leading foreign policy making actor? Does it have the resources? Can the State Department become more of an expeditionary organization and deploy to the battlefield alongside the military? Is it unsettling that our military is by far the most highly respected institution in the country? Does it matter that American citizens seemed to have lost faith in their governing institutions? and perhaps also in their media? How much longer can the Army and Marine Corps bear the strains of Iraq and Afghanistan? What happens when the military is needed elsewhere to help execute other foreign policy initiatives? What are the advantages and disadvantages of "contracting out" security operations to private military companies? Is such a tactic wise?

This paper offers many questions, and no answers. Participants must first establish an objective and empirical understanding of the topics offered to them before offering a normative analysis. Additionally, participants must determine which of the myriad questions truly matter in expanding our understanding of the ways in which domestic issues influence foreign policy. As the world becomes increasingly small and interconnected, it is increasingly important to consider the domestic politics of the United

States and both her allies and enemies as domestic politics can and do have a very real impact on the foreign policies states pursue.

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