

Viewpoint: What is our role in the world?

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What is America's role in the world?

Voters in Northwest Florida have a chance to answer this question. With U.S. Rep. Jeff Miller stepping down, new candidates are vying to represent District 1 in Washington.

In the presidential race, foreign policy remains a live issue. What did Hillary Clinton know about Benghazi? Are Trump's wall and his ban on Muslims serious proposals? Specific questions like these help us vet particular candidates.

More generally, though, broader questions have arisen. How responsible is the United States for international stability? What about trade — what are the benefits of open commerce? Terrorism, the environment, prosperity, leadership and more.

Such questions are also vital issues for those seeking to represent our corner of Florida.

In my view, though, the basic question is simple: What is America's role in the world?

Constitutionally, the House of Representatives oversees foreign policy with the “power of the purse” by vetting and voting on budgets as well as investigating the Executive Branch. After Vietnam, Congress also passed the War Powers Resolution. Though contested by presidents, it illustrates Congress' potential to reject or approve foreign policies. In 2003, for example, the Bush administration argued that it had permission to invade Iraq under Congress' vote authorizing military force.

Congress enjoys other, less obvious powers. Over the last 20 years, for example, members of Congress have sponsored bills for tighter sanctions on Cuba, North Korea and Iran. In at least two of these cases, Congress exceeded or contradicted the president's position. In fact, despite Obama's formal diplomatic overtures to Havana, the U.S. embargo will only end if and when Congress votes.

Further, since the 1940s, Congressional-Executive Agreements have emerged to circumvent the Constitution's high barriers for treaties. Arrangements like last year's nuclear deal with Iran, for instance, requires votes from House members and effectively carries the weight of a treaty.

Americans today — after military interventions and a global recession — are weary and worried about international leadership. They are right to press candidates on protecting American interests at home.

Bear in mind, though, that there are two historical motivations for U.S. global leadership: Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. After World War II, the United States emerged uniquely powerful and set up a new political and economic system. Its goal was to integrate the world and prevent another such conflict. The Cold War reinforced this approach because the new system was designed to support democracy and, eventually, human rights. It is a system that, ideally, represents American values.

That system is also aging. Skeptics worry that it overextends our resources. Challenges like economic globalization, technological integration and international terrorism raise a new host of challenges.

Congressman Miller has focused on veterans affairs in Congress. This is essential for our community and our next representative.

To remain competitive and safe in an interconnected world, our next representative should also demonstrate a good understanding of where future conflicts may be fought and where future economic opportunities may emerge. That person will also need to articulate what American values represent. The United States is uniquely powerful. Perhaps that fact requires unique responsibilities, or at least unique vigilance.

This summer, our congressional race is reaching a crescendo. If you get the chance, I hope you press our candidates on a simple question:

What is our role in the world?

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