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The American national interest and global public goods

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Abstract

Since the end of the Cold War, Americans have been divided over how to be involved with the rest of the world. In the wake of the 11 September terrorist

attacks, the debate between those who favour a unilateral foreign policy and those who advocate a multilateral approach has been brought to the fore in American politics and the media.

In this article, Joseph Nye proposes a conception of the American national interest grounded in multilateralism. He argues that, although the United States remains the world's leading power, it cannot act alone to solve global problems such as transnational terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and global warming. Although the United States is the only country in a position to take the lead in protecting 'global public goods', such as an open international economic system and international stability, it will maintain its current predominance only if it works to establish international consensus on issues of global importance.

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