TRUMAN SECURITY PRIMER

Essential Policy and Messaging for National Security Issues on the Campaign Trail
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About Truman

Truman is a nationwide membership of diverse leaders inspired to serve in the aftermath of 9/11 and committed to shaping and advocating for tough, smart national security solutions. We are united in the belief that America is strongest when we stand with our allies to lead, support, and defend a growing global community of free people and just societies.

Our community includes more than 1,850 post-9/11 veterans, frontline civilians, policy experts, and political professionals who share a common vision of U.S. leadership abroad and hail from 16 Chapters and 47 different states across the nation.

We believe that America is at its best when we use all the tools in our toolbox: diplomacy, defense, development, and democracy promotion. Truman National Security Project, along with our sister organization Truman Center, identifies, trains, and positions leaders across America who share this worldview. We bring our members together with our partners and advisors to deliver concrete solutions to pressing global challenges for leaders at the local, state, and national levels, and we coordinate their action nationwide to shape the debate, fight for policy change, and support rising leaders who share our values.

This messaging booklet contains some of Truman’s topline guidance on the national security issues likely to lead the conversation on the 2018 campaign trail. Truman provides a number of other communications and policy products and services that may be of interest to elected officials and candidates who want to ensure that they are making the right arguments on issues of national security. These products and services include daily and weekly messaging emails, monthly calls featuring Truman experts doing ‘deep dives’ on the issues, skills trainings, issue briefings, and more.

To sign up for any of the communications and messaging products available from Truman Project, please contact Communications Director Graham West (gwest@trumanproject.org). For inquiries about Truman trainings for elected officials, candidates, and staffers, please contact Director of Training and Public Engagement Anthony “Rob” Robinson (arobinson@trumanproject.org). And for general questions about Truman Project’s political programming and support for candidates, please contact Congressional Engagement Manager Mackenzie Cannon (mcannon@trumanproject.org).
The Truman Worldview

Since the administration of President Harry S. Truman, the United States of America has worked to build and lead an international community of free people and just societies, defend that community against all who wish to tear it down, and offer opportunity to all. This worldview—one that sees effective American leadership in the world exercised via diplomacy, defense, development, and democracy-building tools—has served not only to improve lives and reduce violence around the world, but also to enhance American security and prosperity here at home. To be sure, we have made some missteps along the way: We have rushed into conflicts, acted out of step with our own values, and been uneven in our championing of human rights at home and abroad. However, at the end of the day, America can and should be a force for good in the world precisely because American greatness is not preordained or guaranteed, but a process of self-reflection that encourages us to better ourselves in the course of our attempts to help others towards shared prosperity and security.

Unfortunately, there have always been persistent challenges to a ‘muscular internationalist’ vision of American leadership. The Trump Administration and its Republican allies in Congress have advanced a combination of those harmful ideologies since the 2016 election. The first is neoconservatism, a belief that America should go it alone and use a “military first, military only” approach to address any problem worth solving abroad, including regime change to advance Western liberal democracy. The second is an isolationism best summarized by then-candidate Trump’s “America First” slogan: the notion that international cooperation is unnecessary, and that most problems in the world (and the international alliances and institutions that work to solve them) lead to costly foreign entanglements or present an unfair burden on American citizens. These lines of reasoning, combined with President Trump’s boorish and erratic behavior in international settings, are causing serious damage to America’s credibility and standing abroad.

Truman Project believes that while the world we confront today is in many ways different from the one our predecessors faced, the principled internationalist approach that built America into the greatest force for global progress remains fundamental to addressing both the challenges and the opportunities of our time. Neoconservatism, isolationism, and even pacifism—expressed as isolationism by the American Left—each have their attractive qualities to some policymakers, but none of these ideologies provide the answers we need in the here and now. The following tenants of our worldview, however, can provide those answers.

**Security requires matching a wide variety of tools to a wider range of threats.** The 21st century is marked by blurring borders, contested spaces, fragile and failing states, the proliferation of dangerous technologies, increasingly capable non-state actors, and the aspirations of resurgent and rising states. These challenges require more than just military force, and they won't be solved by withdrawing from the world stage. Instead, we need to renew partnerships and institutions abroad while building up both traditional and innovative capabilities at home.

*Military might is important, but it’s not the only thing we need to stay safe. The United States needs to invest in the people, resources, and ideas to confront both immediate and long-term threats.*

**There is a direct connection between the prosperity of our middle class at home and a safer world abroad.** As the world economy grows increasingly interlocked, our security and prosperity are further intertwined with the expansion of a global middle class of consumers. We need to lead the way with policies that draw strength from core American principles like fairness and responsibility rather than deepen the inequalities that fuel hatred and desperation.
The middle class is the engine of American strength and power. Globalization has happened; now, our policymakers need to figure out what policies will best enable Americans to continue to thrive in the new economy we all face.

The physical and social infrastructure that unifies our communities also enhances our domestic security. With so many threats transcending political borders, American communities have to be robust enough to withstand everything from viruses to virulent ideologies. Because our biggest challenges require collective action, U.S. leadership in uniting different peoples towards common objectives begins with reinforcing the bonds between our own communities here at home. By leading a global exchange of creative ideas and crowdsourcing the solutions to the problems we face, we draw on our strengths as a democracy and empower others by the force of our example.

As the scope of the threats we face increases, the need for traditional community connections grows ever stronger. Getting ideas and leaders from local communities into the national conversation is fundamental to living our values and preventing strategic stagnation—and weakness.

Pluralism is a great strategic asset of our nation to be leveraged—not a weakness to be hedged against. Our values and our interests demand that we find new and better ways of ensuring that every American has the inspiration and incentive to contribute their unique ability towards addressing our greatest security challenges. This means deliberate efforts to attract, develop, and retain the most capable public servants, but it also requires prioritizing equality of opportunity in a way that truly elevates the greatest minds of our generation.

America does best when we find our leaders from all walks of life. Respecting the diversity of our people isn’t just morally right—it gives us an advantage over those with narrow-minded views that are inherently more limiting.

These four ‘pillars’—comprehensive security, shared prosperity, strong communities, and diversity in leadership—are the core components of the Truman Framework. The Framework is a guide to understanding modern challenges in the context of our values-driven worldview. More than 375 Truman members, hailing from 30 states across the nation and bringing together a variety of regional and functional expertise, contributed to its completion; you can explore the full document here.

For a guide to the application of this worldview to the pressing national security issues on the 2018 campaign trail, read on.
Russia

Topline Message

Russia is a historic adversary of the United States that regularly violates international norms in aggression and actively attempts to undermine American interests and democracy at every turn. The U.S. intelligence community has decisively confirmed that Vladimir Putin’s regime interfered in the 2016 presidential election, and it will do so again unless opposed forcefully by leaders across our political spectrum.

Background

Russia has long been a geopolitical foe of the United States due to fundamental differences in interests, values, and worldviews; Vladimir Putin’s regime in particular has a track record of interfering in foreign elections and a demonstrated strategic goal in undermining liberal democracy around the world. Russia represents a real threat to the United States and stands as a serious player on the world stage: In addition to having the third largest defense budget in the world and being the second largest producer of natural gas and third largest oil producer, it is also the tenth most populous country, holds a massive arsenal of declared nuclear weapons, and retains a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council.

In just the past decade, Russia has been on the opposite side of the United States in several international crises. In 2007, Russia launched a series of cyber attacks against NATO member state Estonia; in 2008, it invaded the former Soviet state of Georgia, resulting in the separation of two pro-Russian provinces. In 2014, Russia seized the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine after the overthrow of Ukraine’s pro-Russian government. Russia has since backed Ukrainian separatists and used their own military forces to fight the Ukrainian government, resulting in thousands of deaths—including almost 300 civilians who died when pro-Russian militants shot down an airliner. Finally, Russia has been a steadfast supporter of Syria’s Bashar Al-Assad throughout the brutal Syrian civil war, and has provided cover for his mass murder—which has included the repeated use of chemical weapons—multiple times via its United Nations Security Council veto power.

In addition to all of this, the U.S. intelligence community has unanimously and publicly stated that Vladimir Putin’s regime took steps to influence the 2016 U.S. presidential election to the benefit of then-candidate Trump. President Trump is curiously deferential to and complimentary of Putin, often at the expense of U.S. allies or interests; moreover, many individuals in the Trump Administration, campaign, and broader orbit have questionable ties to and a favorable predisposition towards Russia. Special Counsel Robert Mueller III, appointed by the Department of Justice in May 2017, is now running an investigation into questions of possible collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia to influence the 2016 election, Trump-Russia relationships, and any connected issues; his work is proceeding in tandem with investigations by multiple congressional committees.

Main Points

Russia is a longtime hostile adversary of the United States, and continued insistences that they are an ally—paired with failures to push back against their actions on the world stage—will have
consequences for our national security. Russia has intimidated and invaded its neighbors, backed a murderous dictator in Syria, and attempted to undermine elections in multiple European nations. Since President Trump has taken office, Putin’s regime has also harassed U.S. ships and planes, positioned submarines off our coast, and built and deployed illegal missiles—without any rebuke from the United States. Putin will continue pushing the envelope unless we push back, and when the Trump Administration does things like delay enforcement of bipartisan sanctions, call for Russia’s readmission to the G7, or accept his lies about not interfering in the 2016 election, the United States appears divided, foolish, and weak on the world stage.

Russia is one of our historic adversaries, and the past ten years have tensions at their highest since the end of the Cold War. President Trump may be willing to kowtow to Putin, but Republicans and Democrats alike know that Russia continually opposes our interests and our values around the world.

Engaging Russia on the world stage requires coordinating with and sending strong signals to our allies abroad. Putin’s aggressive foreign policy is all about showing strength abroad in order to undermine the notion of liberal democracy and keep his people distracted from a fledging economy at home. We can continue to crank up the pressure by coordinating sanctions with our European allies and affirming our commitment to NATO; the latter includes supporting membership for countries that qualify, and financially assisting with armaments, economic aid, and democratic transitions elsewhere. Of course the United States has to keep the possibility of cooperation with Russia open, but we can do that while opposing Putin’s worst behavior and not letting him play us for fools. It also means not getting into foolish disputes with our traditional allies who share our values and interests.

There’s no denying that we will need to deal with Russia on the global stage, but we can keep that possibility open while pressuring them through economic and diplomatic measures and standing firm for a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace.

The U.S. intelligence community unanimously agrees that Russia successfully interfered in the 2016 presidential election. On 06 January 2017, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence published a report concluding that Russia influenced our election to hurt Secretary Clinton and help Trump. Their operations include, but are not limited to: hacking and leaking private emails of individuals and entities (e.g. John Podesta and the Democratic National Committee) through Wikileaks, setting up “bot” social media accounts to impersonate Americans and signal boost fake news (some of which was promoted by Trump team members), purchasing digital election ads, and targeting election infrastructure in 21 U.S. states. While there is no evidence as of yet that Russia directly manipulated vote totals, there are clearly many other ways to influence an election.

President Trump may accept Putin’s promises that he didn’t meddle in our election, but our intelligence agencies have clearly and unanimously stated that Russia did intervene to his benefit. If we don’t study the problem and take steps to protect our democracy, we’ll get hit again in 2018, 2020, and beyond.

Investigations into Russia’s election interference and collusion with the Trump orbit are in the national security interest of the United States and must continue free of influence by the executive branch. President Trump and others repeatedly insisted that no one in his orbit had any contact with Russians. The investigation, by contrast, has so far revealed indictments and guilty pleas, two attempts at collusion (one involving Wikileaks, and another with the campaign chairman and a senior advisor), details about disinformation (retweeted by the Trump campaign), tales of individual corruption, conversations about sanctions relief and secret backchannels during the transition, lies on forms and under oath about foreign contacts, and so much more. All of these issues warrant full investigation, and those who have done
wrong must be removed from sensitive positions. We must also guard against any attempt by the president to obstruct justice or otherwise influence due process; there is demonstrated bipartisan support for legislation to protect the special counsel’s position and investigation from a politically motivated firing, and Congress must pass legislation to that end.

Only Americans should get to choose our leaders, free from influence by a foreign power. Any Trump team member who has lied about their contacts or actions should be disciplined, not rewarded with access to U.S. government secrets—and justice needs to be served, whether the president likes it or not.

Sample Debate Lines

**Opposition:** Putin is a strong leader well-respected by his people; we should be working with him, rather than insisting on this collusion story, which is nothing more than Democratic fake news to excuse their election loss.

**Response:** Putin is a dictator who opposes American interests and democratic ideals at every turn—our own intelligence community has confirmed he meddled in the 2016 election. We need to hold him accountable on the world stage alongside our NATO and other European allies; meanwhile, we also need to understand how he undermined our democracy (and who helped him do it), or else it will happen again.
North Korea

Topline Message

*The regime of Kim Jong Un poses a real security threat to U.S. forces, citizens, and allies throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Economic pressure and steady diplomacy—not bluster and aggression—are the best ways to address this threat; a military conflict on the Korean Peninsula would be catastrophic.*

Background

The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, commonly called North Korea, was created in the aftermath of World War II. Kim Il Sung announced the formation of the country during the Cold War with the Soviet Union’s backing in 1948, and since then, it has been ruled by the dynastic, isolated, and extremely oppressive regime he put in place; Kim Jong Un, grandson of Kim Il Sung, now rules the country. North Korea conducted its first successful nuclear weapons test in October 2006 under Kim Jong Un’s father, Kim Jong Il, and regularly engages in destabilizing behavior on the international stage—specifically including nuclear and missile testing aimed at perfecting and expanding its nuclear arsenal.

North Korea’s development of its nuclear program and increasingly powerful and sophisticated delivery mechanisms has been a major international challenge for years. Since President Trump took office, Pyongyang has conducted more than 15 missile tests, each drawing condemnation from the international community. In addition, on 04 July 2017, the regime successfully tested for the first time an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) with an estimated range of more than 3,700 miles; on 03 September, it conducted a nuclear test of a weapon it claimed to be a thermonuclear bomb. While the Trump Administration’s initial posture towards North Korea was one of open hostility (through both strong, carefully coordinated sanctions as well as reckless rhetoric), that position softened as President Trump began to push for a face-to-face meeting, long-sought by Pyongyang, with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Though the meeting was temporarily cancelled once before, it was held on Tuesday, 12 June, in Singapore.

During the meeting, President Trump pledged to end joint U.S.-South Korean military exercises, only briefly discussed North Korea's dismal human rights record, and received a vague promise from Kim that Pyongyang would shut down a missile testing site and support the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Further talks between the United States and North Korea will reportedly be held, during which the Trump Administration must practice responsible diplomacy that meaningfully and verifiably reduces or removes the threat posed by Pyongyang, while preserving U.S. interests and alliances and avoiding the flowery praise of the Kim regime to which President Trump appears prone. This delicate balancing act must move forward because military conflict on the Korean Peninsula would be catastrophic, and the risks...
of escalation—given North Korea’s likely ability to deliver nuclear weapons against treaty allies South Korea and Japan, as well as U.S. forces deployed in the region—is almost incalculably high.

Main Points

Despite this diplomatic opening, North Korea is no friend to the United States and remains a dangerous actor on the world stage. North Korea has enough plutonium for 10 nuclear devices, and it may have enough for 100 by 2020. It can also deliver a warhead on a short- or medium-range ballistic missile and has successfully tested an ICBM. With each missile and nuclear test it has conducted, Pyongyang learned more about how to develop their technology—and that’s dangerous, since they’re moving toward the ability to shoot a missile at the continental United States. President Trump should be much more guarded in his interactions with Kim; his over-the-top flattery is embarrassing, especially in light of the way he often treats our longstanding allies. Any agreement that may come from this diplomatic opening will need to verifiably mitigate the real threat we face from North Korea; so far, the Trump Administration has treated those asking for clarification on the essential details very poorly.

President Trump needs to remember that North Korea remains a serious threat. Any agreement concerning denuclearization must be based on technical verification—not promises and flattery.

The meeting in Singapore was essentially a photo-op, yet President Trump continues to make concessions while getting little in return. The agreement the two men signed was non-binding and very non-specific. Still, President Trump promised to stop U.S.-South Korean joint military exercises with our allies in the region, stating that such "war games" are "tremendously expensive," "very provocative," and "inappropriate." In return, Kim promised to shutter a missile testing site, but established no verifiable way to do so. Throughout this process, the Trump Administration has made concessions (e.g. the propaganda victory of the summit itself) and showered Kim with praise, all while Kim’s regime has offered only vague promises and empty gestures. As the diplomatic process moves forward, the United States must be tough and smart in seeking outcomes that enhance our security and advance human rights in North Korea—all while ensuring that Kim does not take advantage of President Trump’s weakness for flattery and desire for good press.

Diplomacy must always be our first, best option for solving conflicts on the world stage. That being said, the Trump Administration can’t keep making concessions without receiving anything in return.

Our next steps forward need to be undertaken carefully, in consultation with our allies and led by experienced diplomatic professionals. Securing a denuclearized Korean Peninsula cannot be done on our own; the United States must rally the support of our allies in the region, such as South Korea and Japan. President Trump’s pledge, however, to end joint military exercises with South Korea damaged that support, particularly since he did so without advance notice to or discussion with South Korean President Moon Jae-in, let alone his own Defense Department. Furthermore, describing such coordinated exercises with an ally as expensive and unnecessary war games sends a message to U.S. allies across the world that similar exercises are no longer important to the United States. Moving forward, the Trump Administration should let a fully-funded State Department take charge of coordinating a tough, negotiation process alongside our allies.

Pursuing diplomacy without the support of our long-standing allies in the region will only inhibit denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula; instead, the United States must act alongside our allies and with the expertise of a fully staffed, qualified State Department.
All that to say, the cost of conflict on the Korean Peninsula would still be catastrophic, and the risk of escalation is serious. It is critical to remember that Pyongyang now allegedly has a missile that could hit the United States—and even if that technology is still imperfect, it does possess nuclear weapons capable of targeting more than 60,000 U.S. troops in South Korea and Japan alone and millions of allied civilians. Moreover, the presence of nuclear-armed China next door poses additional escalation risks. Before he decided to pursue his version of diplomacy, President Trump made it clear time and again with his ‘fire and fury’ rhetoric that he has no conception of how costly a conflict on the Korean Peninsula would be to the world economy, regional stability, and our own military. All this means that diplomacy is still our first, best option for resolving issues with North Korea—it just needs to be done in a strong, smart, and principled manner.

Since the outset, the Trump Administration has gone back and forth between provocative rhetoric and diplomatic efforts; the latter must remain the course given the catastrophic consequences of military escalation.

Sample Debate Lines

Opposition: The North Korean nuclear threat is resolved, thanks to a historic meeting between powerful leaders. President Trump deserves all the credit—and probably a Nobel Peace Prize—because he walked away with a win by securing Kim’s promise to denuclearize (and ending expensive war games with our freeloader ‘allies,’ to boot).

Response: The meeting in Singapore was an important start because diplomacy should always be our first, best option for resolving crisis on the world stage. Still, it is critical to remember that the North Korean threat is still real: So far, President Trump has handed over propaganda victories and praise while undermining our allies and achieving no concrete or verifiable plans for North Korea to actually denuclearize. We have a long road ahead of us, and it will require strong, smart diplomacy—not flattering a dictator.
Iran and the Nuclear Agreement

Topline Message

The Iranian regime engages in dangerous, destabilizing behavior across the Middle East, but we must challenge that behavior without destroying the nuclear agreement we and other leading countries achieved with Iran. The “Iran Deal” has prevented an Iranian nuclear weapon through hard limits and invasive inspections—all without firing a shot.

Background

The Islamic Republic of Iran was established in 1979, and relations between it and the United States soured immediately due to longstanding U.S. support for the previous monarchy as well as a hostage crisis that lasted for more than a year. Diplomatic relations broke over that crisis, and each country antagonized the other in the following decades. Iran’s behavior in recent years has been particularly problematic, including testing ballistic missiles in defiance of the United Nations and funding extremists in Iraq, Lebanon, and beyond that have attacked U.S. forces and our allies.

Iran is legally permitted to develop civilian nuclear energy under the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons, an agreement codified and enforced by the United Nations (and signed by Iran in 1968), but there have always been concerns as to if their intentions were peaceful or not. Stopping a nuclear-armed Iran has long been a top policy priority of the United States. In 2015, the P5+1 world powers (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia, and China) announced the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran, otherwise known as the “Iran Deal.” This historic agreement was the result of two years of tough, principled, and American-led negotiations designed to keep the world safe from a nuclear weapon in Iran’s hands—and was accomplished all without firing a single shot. In return for compliance with agreed-upon limits and the toughest inspections regime in the history of arms control, Iran has slowly received modest economic relief from decades of crippling sanctions.

After choosing to certify the deal and Iranian compliance therewith in both April and July 2017 (with reassessment every 90 days mandated by U.S. law), President Trump chose to “decertify” the deal that following October. Then, on 08 May 2018, President Trump violated the agreement by refusing to re-issue sanctions waivers and thus withdrew the United States entirely. Each of these steps were taken—and ultimately, the United States was the first and only party to break the deal’s terms—despite the fact that all indications and assessments show that the Iran Deal does not need to be “fixed” because it is working. By violating the agreement, President Trump has damaged our international credibility. In the best case scenario, he has relegated the United States to the sidelines in further efforts to mitigate Iran’s harmful behavior on the world stage; depending on his further actions, he may also put us on a path to sanctioning our own allies or engaging in a highly destructive armed conflict with Iran.
Main Points

Through tough, principled diplomacy, we reached our goal of an agreement that prevents a nuclear weapon in Tehran based on verification, not trust. So far, the agreement has seen 13,000 centrifuges and 98 percent of Iran’s highly enriched uranium stockpile removed and Iran’s only plutonium reactor disabled. Meanwhile, the best nuclear inspectors in the world watch Iran's entire supply chain—from the mines to the laboratories—to ensure against a “sneak out” method of producing a weapon quickly and quietly. The agreement was always focused on stopping an Iranian nuclear weapon because that was the top priority; we knew it would take additional work down the road to address Iran’s ballistic missile program, support for terrorism in the Middle East, and more.

The Iran Deal is keeping us safe not by forcing us to trust Iran, but by keeping the world’s best nuclear watchdogs trained on every part of Iran’s seriously cut-down nuclear energy program. Tearing down this progress just because the deal only addresses the nuclear threat was a foolish move.

President Trump’s decision to violate from the deal is already having serious consequences for our diplomatic credibility. Undermining our own agreement weakened our credibility with allies and adversaries alike at a critical moment when we are trying to make forward progress with North Korea. With regard to Iran specifically, our allies and partners have already said that they will not join us in levying harsh new sanctions on Iran. This means that any new measures we put forward are the opposite of the strong, principled, and coordinated sanctions that brought Iran to the table; we’ll be left out while other countries keep engaging Tehran to work towards mitigating its destructive behavior.

Breaking the deal has left us alone once again, hollering on the sidelines while other countries work to build on progress. It’s also left the world with a question: Who wants to deal with the United States if we change the terms of or walk away from our own agreements?

Any further efforts to unilaterally punish Iran or those who do business with Iranians need to be carefully constructed as to not result in us sanctioning our own allies. Because our allies and partners have chosen to remain committed to the Iran Deal, we need to make sure than any further actions that we take do not inadvertently or intentionally result in the United States sanctioning our own allies in Europe. Due to President Trump’s reckless actions around the G7 and bad-faith negotiating regarding NAFTA, we have enough tensions with our allies right now when it comes to trade; further missteps will only throw fuel on the fire and isolate us even more.

It would add insult to injury if we ended up inflicting economic ‘friendly fire’ on our own allies just because they are continuing to engage with Iran and keep the agreement—including the nuclear limits and inspectors—working.

The agreement persists for now thanks to our allies and partners, but the threat of a destructive conflict still looms large. If something happens with the parties who remain in the deal, we’re looking down the barrel of a bad situation: The sanctions regime will collapse, and Iran will be free of all limits on its nuclear program as well as the watchdogs who were enforcing them. This could put us on the course for another deadly conflict in the name of nuclear non-proliferation in the Middle East. The Trump Administration, which has flirted with language hinting at a policy of or close to ‘regime change’ with regard to Iran, must understand that if they keep working to provoke the full collapse of the agreement, they risk starting a conflict far more costly than the Iraq War—entirely by choice.
Thankfully, other countries are working hard to preserve the agreement and ensure that Iran’s nuclear limits and monitors remain in place. If things go south, we could be on a course for conflict—and the world will blame the United States for breaking the deal first.

Sample Debate Lines

**Opposition**: We made a bad deal with Iran and got nothing for it. President Trump was right to withdraw from the deal, and Congress should pass tougher sanctions and more restrictions on Iran until they correct their behavior once and for all.

**Response**: Thanks to our partners, the Iran Deal is still working to stop the biggest threat: an Iranian nuclear weapon. We know this not because we trust Tehran, but because the world’s best nuclear inspectors are on the ground watching. Breaking the agreement has damaged our international credibility and left us on the outside of any further efforts to make progress in countering Iran’s other destructive behavior.
Energy and Climate Security

Topline Message

Our veterans and military leaders know that climate change is a national security threat. The United States needs to lead in countering that threat, including by pushing for international cooperation and developing the clean energy technology that will create jobs, make our fighting force more effective, and lead the United States to strategic success in the 21st century.

Background

The U.S. Department of Defense describes climate change as a “threat multiplier,” which means it makes the jobs of our men and women in uniform more difficult both at home and abroad. Climate change is causing increasingly frequent and intense superstorms, droughts, and floods; the resultant resource shortages and mass migration strains the weakest societies and emboldens the most dangerous extremist groups around the world. Here at home, climate change is a threat as well: Rising sea levels threaten our coastal bases, necessitating costly repairs; wildfires prohibit training exercises and sap resources; and extreme heat, which often results in power outages in the fragile U.S. electric grid, can render bases temporarily incapable of supporting troops in the field.

In December 2015, nearly 200 countries gathered in Paris, France, for the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference (COP21). These meetings resulted in the Paris Climate Agreement, which requires each participating country to enact a plan to cut its emissions and then reconvene every five years to raise those standards and publicly disclose progress, as well as ensures financial aid for less-developed countries as they commit to sustainable development. The United States and China ratified the agreement together in a show of unity in September 2016, but unfortunately, President Trump announced he would unilaterally withdraw the United States in June 2017. At present, the United States is the only country in the world that is not adhering to the agreement, with late adapters Nicaragua and Syria signing on in the final months of 2017.

Withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement is not the only way in which the Trump Administration has pushed the United States in the wrong direction of the climate and energy conversation. EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt has also taken steps to roll back the Obama Administration’s Clean Power Plan, which was designed to push states away from climate change-driving fossil fuels for power production and towards clean energy. Administrator Pruitt has done so while mired in scandal, clearly interested in leveraging the resources of the EPA not for environmental protection but for the benefit of himself and his wife. The Trump Administration has also challenged public discussion and federal reporting on climate data; privileged coal, oil, and gas over clean energy investment; and elevated numerous climate science deniers into positions of influence throughout the federal government. All of this flies in the face of military and national security leaders who continue to see the necessity of planning to mitigate threats exacerbated by climate change.
Main Points

**Climate change is a national security threat.** The Department of Defense describes climate change as a “threat multiplier” because it makes the jobs of our men and women in uniform harder. More frequent extreme weather events mean more requests for humanitarian aid, and droughts and resource shortages end up strengthening extremist groups. If we don’t take steps to move away from fossil fuels of the past and towards clean energy of the future, we only make these problems worse—that’s why the military leads the way on clean energy investment and innovation.

> America’s military leaders don’t have the luxury of picking and choosing threats. They know that the effects of climate change and our dependence on oil are costly, unsustainable, and ultimately dangerous to our men and women in uniform.

**The Paris Agreement is a historic step towards fighting that threat because everyone commits to pulling their weight, reporting back, and ratcheting up their commitments.** The world has tried to reach consensus on fighting climate change in the past, but thanks to serious American diplomacy, this agreement made the most progress yet. It commits every country, developed and developing alike, to realistic goals aimed at keeping the global increase in temperature under the two degrees Celsius mark. Countries will also hold each other accountable, with each government required to provide updates on their targets and recommit to more ambitious goals every five years.

> This deal is historic because every country—big and small, rich and poor—has to pull its weight. Climate change is a global problem, and that means everyone has to pitch in on the solution.

**Pulling out of the Paris Agreement sends the wrong message to the world and put us at a strategic disadvantage.** American leadership produced the Paris Agreement, and the hard work of diplomacy to ratify it in unprecedented coordination with China gave it life. By retreating now, we telegraph to the world that we are giving up our leadership role, and the hit to our credibility will make international cooperation on issues like terrorism and trade harder. Meanwhile, turning our backs on investments in clean energy technology will signal to nations like China and India that they can continue to outpace us in researching, developing, and ultimately exporting the clean energy technologies that should be contributing to jobs and growth here at home.

> Stepping back from the Paris Agreement didn’t just send a message to the world that we are “going it alone.” This choice also signals to the European Union that they should look for partners and leaders elsewhere, and to China and India that they can continue to beat us in investing in the energy technologies of the 21st century.

**Our efforts to counter the long-term threat of climate change don’t come at the expense of other national security issues.** Some people say we shouldn’t be focused on climate change with so many other threats on the horizon, and they’re right that we need to stay vigilant against extremists like ISIS and challenges from Russia or North Korea. Still, we have to answer all threats—not just the ones that are politically attractive. The national security risks of climate change must be taken seriously; the military is already leading the way, but some of our civilian political leaders need to catch up.

> We can’t just pick and choose which threats we want to face—we have to handle long- and short-term challenges. Thankfully, the U.S. military knows how to walk and chew gum at the same time.
Sample Debate Lines

**Opposition**: Climate change may or may not be real and may or may not be manmade, but we have other things to focus on—unproven technologies and globalist treaties shouldn't be a priority when we can produce all the energy we need at home through tried and true means.

**Response**: Climate change is a national security threat—just ask leaders in the military and at the Pentagon. We should be investing in the already proven clean energy technologies of tomorrow for the sake of jobs and growth at home, and because America has always led the way in big fights on the world stage.
Defeating the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

Topline Message

As ISIS’s territory in the Middle East is reduced, we face two challenges: coordinated or inspired attacks at home and abroad will likely increase, and a political endgame is needed in Iraq and Syria to address the underlying causes of the terrorist state’s rise. Addressing these will require serious diplomatic, political, and economic leadership from the United States—plus measured, dignified behavior by the President on the world stage.

Background

ISIS has its origins in Al Qaeda in Iraq, a terrorist group formed during the Iraqi insurgency against the American invasion in 2003. Taking advantage of the chaos and violent factionalism in the civil war in Syria, the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq, and the sectarianism and poor governance in former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki’s government, the group reconstituted itself and began to gain territory. In June 2014, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared himself a caliph and broke his newly formed Islamic State of Iraq and the Syria (ISIS) from Al Qaeda. ISIS’s rise attracted tens of thousands of foreign fighters to its territory, inspired imitation attackers around the world, and resulted in a humanitarian and refugee crisis that has had a serious impact on the broader Middle East, Europe, and the United States.

Operation Inherent Resolve began against ISIS in August 2014. Since then, a global coalition of nations has been working to reduce ISIS’s territory, stop foreign fighters and funding from reaching the so-called caliphate, provide relief to refugees, and push back against extremist messaging for online recruitment. The Trump Administration frequently claims that their actions—and unspecified changes to ‘rules of engagement’ for U.S. forces on the ground—are the reason for recent success against ISIS; in reality, it is the outgrowth of the international cooperation and strategy built and pursued by the Obama Administration. Coalition forces retook Raqqa, Syria—often referred to as ISIS’s ‘capital’—in October 2017. ISIS’s reduced control over territory in the Middle East is a positive development, but it remains important to remember that robust U.S. diplomatic and economic involvement in the political endgames of Iraq, Syria, and other nations in the region will be necessary to prevent the reemergence of ISIS or another group just like it.

As ISIS’s territory has been reduced, it has shifted to behavior more typical of groups like Al Qaeda: enabling attackers to wreak havoc in the countries outside of ISIS-controlled territory, or claiming such attacks after the fact if the perpetrators were inspired by their propaganda. Responses to attacks in the United States should focus on law enforcement and intelligence work so as to understand the connections of the attackers to wider terrorist networks. When they happen abroad, the United States should always extend our condolences and offer these capabilities to partner nations—while also pushing to ensure that the human rights of the innocent are not abused by state security services. The Trump Administration’s current model of rushing to demands for ineffective immigration bans or wasteful spending on a wall does nothing to keep us safe, and instead diminishes the credibility of the United States on the world stage.
Main Points

The military fight against ISIS is going well because we are leveraging our unique capabilities and working with a coalition of allies on the ground. Over the last 15 years, the United States has developed unique capabilities to track networks and capture or kill key terrorist leaders. The proper application of those abilities—along with robust air, logistical, and intelligence support for our allies fighting on the ground—has led to a significant reduction of ISIS’s territory. This work started with the Obama Administration’s diplomatic outreach and military execution, and has continued under President Trump—despite him criticizing and alienating many of our allies on the campaign trail and from the White House.

The key to defeating ISIS has been our effective aid to partner forces on the ground, which has also kept many American servicemembers from risking their lives once more in Iraq. President Trump may claim he did it alone, but full credit goes to the allied effort that began with President Obama’s leadership.

Defeating ISIS is more than a military mission: It also requires economic, diplomatic, and ideological measures. Fighting ISIS isn’t just about bombs; it has required careful coalition building, economic coordination, and more. If we disengage from diplomatic leadership or refuse to address things like the refugee crisis or poor governance by and economic struggles in nations we rely on as key partners in the fight, we won’t address the underlying causes that led to the rise of ISIS in the first place—and we’ll cede valuable influence and authority to adversarial states like Russia and Iran. The rise of ISIS, and what comes after them, is just one of many reasons why diplomacy, development, and democracy promotion are all just as important to our national security as a strong defense is.

These problems can never be solved by military action alone. The United States has to be a leader in facilitating viable political solutions for places like Iraq and Syria; if we disengage now, other nations will fill that role to suit their own interests—and we’ll be back in the same fight before we know it.

There is a proper response for when ISIS-affiliated or inspired attackers hit the United States or our ally and partner nations, but the Trump Administration hasn’t demonstrated it so far. Unfortunately, attacks by troubled individuals who are resourced or inspired by ISIS will likely increase as the so-called caliphate’s territory keeps shrinking. When those attacks happen, we need to first respond with empathy for the victims, followed with steady resolve to leverage our intelligence and law enforcement capabilities so that we can better understand the threat and how to prevent the next attack. Immigration bans and border walls will not keep us safe, and it is as counterproductive as it is offensive for the president to demand them in the minutes after an attack as details are still emerging; moreover, his inflammatory rhetoric risks energizing extremists among our own population.

After attacks, we should respond with empathy and steady resolve—not bluster or bragging. Our priority should always be to keep Americans safe, bring justice to the perpetrators, and understand their networks and capabilities so we can defeat them effectively; when engaging the public, our leaders’ rhetoric must unite and reassure rather than divide and spread fear.

ISI isn’t the only type of extremist group that threatens the United States. Since even before President Trump took office, his rhetoric and policies have energized far right extremism in the United States—as exemplified by the violence perpetrated by white nationalists in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017. Elected officials should take this domestic terrorism seriously because all Americans, regardless of race or faith, deserve to feel safe in their homes and communities. This starts with removing those with white nationalist leanings from the White House, restoring Countering Violent Extremism
programming and funding to the Department of Homeland Security, and demanding that President Trump do a better job condemning these hateful ideas that run contrary to core American values.

\[\text{White nationalists have been undoubtedly energized by some of the Trump Administration’s messages and policies. We need to take this type of extremism seriously because it threatens our communities—especially when the President of the United States has a hard time unequivocally condemning it.}\]

Sample Debate Lines

**Opposition:** President Trump is leading the way to defeat ISIS, and we need to keep getting tougher—only by using the military might of the United States over there plus strong border protections back here can we stay safe from radical Islamic terrorism!

**Response:** Finishing the fight against ISIS means staying engaged with diplomacy, development, and democracy promotion in the Middle East, or we’ll be fighting the same fight for decades to come. In the meantime, President Trump needs more serious responses to terrorist attacks that don’t make us look foolish on the world stage—and he should start taking far right extremism at home seriously, too.
Worsening Immigration Policy

Topline Message

The Trump Administration is making a series of deliberate choices in policy and rhetoric to craft an immigration policy that is antithetical to American values. We are a nation of immigrants, and diversity makes us strong; we can welcome others into our melting-pot society while staying safe, and if we choose not to, we risk our national identity, moral credibility, and strategic advantage.

Background

In April 2018, Attorney General Jeff Sessions ordered a “zero tolerance” policy, which focused on charging more people with illegal entry. This policy led to the separation of children from their parents at the border because those charged are sent to federal prison, where their children cannot join them. When doubling down on this policy a month later, Sessions said, “If you don’t like that, then don’t smuggle children over our border.” Chief of Staff John Kelly, policy advisor Steven Miller, and DHS Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen also each defended Sessions’ draconian policy; President Trump blamed it on the Democratic Party. This policy led to the indefinite detention of many children in facilities of wildly varying quality, and horror stories of parents and children forcibly and physically torn apart. In June, Attorney General Sessions also changed rules to deny women who face physical and psychological domestic abuse and people fleeing gang violence the right to seek asylum. These changes ignored existing security screening measures for asylum-seekers and are set to have significant effects on the number of asylum-seekers who are successful in their efforts.

In the midst of this crisis, President Trump signed an executive order that explained the administration’s intent to detain entire families indefinitely—which is very unlikely to hold up in court. It also included no provision for the reunification of those children already taken from their parents, and directed the Department of Defense to aid in the creation of detention facilities for families as they are being held before prosecution. The Trump Administration presented this as a ‘solution’ to the crisis that they themselves created, all while the president continues to use increasingly dangerous rhetoric regarding immigrants and demands more hardline immigration proposals in Congress (including attacks on longstanding tenets of our immigration system like the Diversity Visa Lottery and family-based migration). What’s more, all of this comes in the context of the administration’s having rescinded the DACA program in 2017—and refusing to provide a promised solution that doesn’t involve poison pill asks like an ineffective, wasteful, and taxpayer-funded border wall with Mexico.

There is no national security justification for an immigration policy rooted in abject cruelty towards the innocent. These actions are unlawful and immoral, and are rooted in the reactionary, xenophobic, and white nationalist tendencies of the Trump Administration. The United States needs policies that actually keep us safe, while also recognizing the fundamental truths that we are a nation of immigrants as well as that diversity is our great strength.
Main Points

The Trump Administration threw the future of up to a million Americans into limbo by rescinding DACA without a plan, and they need to fix that mistake immediately. The Americans previously protected by DACA were brought to this country as children, and they are held to high standards of academic engagement and legal behavior. They are not a security or economic risk—they are part of the fabric of our nation, and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Rescinding DACA threw them and their families into legal limbo, putting them at risk of deportation for no reason; the American people overwhelmingly support this program, and it’s past time for a permanent fix that protects these members of our communities.

DACA is a common-sense program with wide, bipartisan support that will embrace upstanding Americans who have known no country but the United States for their whole lives. Ending it without a plan moving forward was beyond irresponsible, and we need a fix now.

Family separations are a deliberate and cruel policy choice made by the Trump Administration. President Trump has repeatedly described the separations of parents and children at the southern border as a law passed by Democrats, but that is not true—it is a direct consequence of Attorney General Sessions’ deliberate policy choice to criminally prosecute anyone crossing the border, including asylum seekers. (Incidentally, Sessions also recently ruled that fleeing domestic abuse or gang violence is no longer grounds for seeking asylum in the United States). Multiple figures in the Trump Administration have claimed that breaking up families is a deterrent to border crossings, but there is no evidence that this is true; it is also creating a huge logistical challenge and a moral travesty as children are forced into detention centers and tent cities. Congress needs to reverse this policy through legislation now.

No child, toddler, or infant should be taken from his or her parents by someone wearing an American uniform. There is no deterrent value in this type of cruelty, and Congress should act immediately to prevent the Trump Administration from continuing to implement this policy.

President Trump’s proposed border wall is a comprehensively bad policy. The wall will do nothing to halt illegal immigration or stem the drug trade—but it will cost American taxpayers (not Mexico, as President Trump promised) more than $18 billion over the next 10 years. Drugs more often enter the United States through populated areas in major ports than across (or under) border walls built in empty, unforgiving landscapes; meanwhile, a physical border does nothing to deter immigrants who legally obtain visas to the United States and then overstay them. The wall is clearly an inane vanity project that—regardless of President Trump’s campaign promises—will be funded not by Mexico, but by American taxpayers and via spending cuts to border technology and personnel that actually serve to keep us safe.

President Trump’s useless, expensive, and taxpayer-funded wall will not stop illegal immigration or the drug cartels—especially when it would draw significant financial support away from the crucial equipment and personnel that are actually working to keep us safe.

The Trump Administration is also attacking other key parts of U.S. immigration policy, including Temporary Protected Status (TPS) programs, the Diversity Visa Lottery, and family-based migration. TPS programs allow groups of immigrants to come to America in response to human and natural disasters in their home countries; when conditions in the home country (e.g. extreme violence) have delayed their return, immigrant communities have integrated with our nation and have children who are American citizens. The Trump Administration has ended multiple TPS programs before conditions on
the ground in those countries changed and over the protestations of bipartisan representatives of the affected constituencies. President Trump has also repeatedly attacked the Diversity Visa Lottery program (claiming “they give us their worst people,” when in fact, governments do not select visa recipients), which is an important diplomatic and economic development tool. And family-based migration, which the administration derides as “chain migration,” has been the cornerstone of American immigration policy for decades because it encourages full integration and makes security vetting easier. None of this immigrant-bashing will make us safer—in reality, all it does is feed the xenophobic, white nationalist elements of President Trump’s base.

*The United States has a wide range of immigration policies and programs designed to do good and keep us safe. The Trump Administration and Republicans in Congress are attacking the core pieces of our immigration policy that have made us a successful, melting-pot society. Demonizing immigrants won’t make us safer, and it’s the wrong thing to do in the first place.*

**Sample Debate Lines**

**Opposition:** President Trump is fulfilling his campaign promise to put America First and take care of our own people. We need to build the wall, stem the tide of immigrants rushing across our borders, and get to a merit-based system of immigration that brings fewer and better people to our country.

**Response:** The United States needs an immigration policy based on something other than abject cruelty—something, for instance, like American values. We are a nation of immigrants, and our diversity makes us strong. Attacking immigrants and wasting money on a wall won’t make us safer; we already have the tools we need to welcome others to our nation while staying secure.
Refugees in America

Topline Message

The Trump Administration and some in Congress consider refugees a security threat. In reality, they’re the most thoroughly vetted people that come to our country—and we have both a moral and a strategic imperative to help them.

Background

Refugee admissions have long been politicized, but terror attacks and mass shootings—and the question of ISIS’s involvement or inspiration—have led to a surge in widespread but unfounded security concerns in recent years, including the proposal of harmful legislation. The campaign and presidency of Donald Trump, however, have represented an even more significant increase in harmful rhetoric and policy; President Trump and his administration regularly demonize refugees, lambast “radical Islamic terrorism” while staying silent or covering for the same from white nationalist extremists, and have implemented haphazard and morally bankrupt policies like the so-called Muslim ban as part of a broader general assault on American pluralism.

In accordance with the Refugee Act of 1980, the Trump Administration notified Congress on 27 September 2017 of their proposed refugee admissions cap for FY2018: 45,000 individuals, a historic low point since the cap system was established. Unfortunately, the administration has underperformed even this meager target considerably. In addition, draconian refugee and immigration measures (elaborated upon below) have resulted in a fraction of the Obama Administration’s FY2017 target of 110,000 individuals being resettled in the United States. To put all of these numbers in clearer context, the United Nations High Commission on Refugees reported in June 2017 that 22.5 million refugees are among the 65.6 million displaced peoples around the world.

The Trump Administration’s decision to admit a historically low number of refugees in a time of global crisis represents an abdication of American values and a failure of American leadership. Given the magnitude of human suffering in the world today, our moral and strategic interests cannot be held hostage by small-minded xenophobia; admitting refugees is the right thing to do, and it makes our country stronger.

Main Points

America has the ability and the experience to help in this crisis. Since 1975, the United States has taken in more than 3.2 million refugees, most fleeing from humanitarian crises or civil war. Our strength has always come from how we welcome others into our melting pot society, and our leadership by example
on the world stage matters. Moreover, we can stay safe while we do this: No refugees have been involved in a fatal attack on their fellow Americans since the Refugee Act of 1980 was passed.

*America doesn’t take a backseat in global crises—we lead. The United States has safely welcomed so many to our nation in the past, and we can do the same today.*

**There is already a rigorous process in place to vet the new arrivals.** We have a thorough, well-developed process for vetting refugees that uses tools like biometric data, interviews, background checks, and more throughout a series of overlapping checks that can take 18 to 24 months. While the United Nations refers refugees to the United States, they do not at all control the selection or screening; instead, we rely on career professionals in our security agencies including the FBI, the State Department, the National Counterterrorism Center, and others.

*Security will always be our top priority. We have a lengthy, thorough process to vet refugees that involves numerous agencies—anyone claiming we don’t is either ignorant or deceitful.*

**Refugees are coming to the United States to build a better life for their children.** Refugees, overwhelmingly women and children, are desperate to escape the brutality and war that has destroyed their livelihoods and communities. These people are fleeing violence rather than looking to perpetrate it, and they want to build a better life rather than receive handouts—just like generations of immigrants before them. Officials in the Trump Administration also suppressed part of a Department of Health and Human Services study showing that “the net fiscal impact of refugees was positive over the ten year period” between 2005 and 2014.

*Extremists are rushing to places like Syria to fight, but normal people are trying to get away. Refugees, American Muslims, and Muslims in general aren’t the bad guys—and we must stay true to our values by including them in our society as we all work together to stay safe and build better lives.*

**Turning our backs on Syrian refugees or others fleeing violence by extremists means bolstering ISIS’s worldview.** When ISIS or extremists like them seize control of a town or city, they offer its people a terrible choice: submit to their rule, or die. The United States and other nations need to represent a counterargument that peaceful coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims in the West is indeed possible. If we shut people out and don’t make that case—whether out of fear, apathy, or hatred—we’re indulging a toxic narrative and sending the wrong message to oppressed peoples around the world.

*America is better than paranoia and prejudice. We need to send a message about coexistence and pluralism to the rest of the world rather than agree with the extremists, whose entire ideology is built around a false narrative that Muslims are inherently more violent than non-Muslims and can’t live peacefully in the West.*

**Sample Debate Lines**

**Opposition:** We’ve got too many problems here at home to worry about letting all these newcomers into our country—President Trump is right to put America First and keep this number low, if not eliminate it entirely.

**Response:** The United States can and should welcome refugees, and we have a process to stay safe while doing so. Beyond having a strategic interest and a moral imperative, we need to lead the world by doing our
part to help alleviate the largest refugee crisis since World War II; history will look unkindly on us if we do not.
International Trade

Topline Message

The Trump Administration has taken steps back from the United States’ historic position in favor of strong, principled international trade agreements. Though trade can yield damaging outcomes to some industries, it is crucial that the United States still play a leadership role to minimize those damages and ensure agreements that benefit all.

Background

The United States has traditionally led on international trade agreements in order to shape the ‘rules of the road’ for the global economy and encourage intertwined security and prosperity. Countries across the world are looking for partnerships that can open greater economic opportunity to all, and they will do so with or without us—as exemplified by the new Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) talks, which left the door open for 11 Asia-Pacific countries to sign a new agreement, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, in March 2018 without the United States. Abstaining from trade talks (or making unreasonable demands) means that countries will likely craft agreements that will not only harm American workers, but will not uphold the values we wish to see at play in the international system: environmental stewardship, human rights, and fundamental fairness.

To be clear, there have been downsides to trade deals in the past. Deals like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have led to growth across North America, but also undoubtedly affected employment in some economic sectors and ultimately hurt the American middle class—especially given that the growth coincided with rapid technological advances, causing a decrease in employment. The TPP missed the mark as well, failing to provide meaningful trade adjustment assistance for American workers. Candidates on both sides of the aisle can be quick to attack past trade agreements and demand stronger terms for the United States. President Trump is obviously a prime example, given how he all but weaponized anti-trade sentiment during the 2016 election; now, however, his administration is tanking new NAFTA talks with unreasonable demands, attacking our G7 allies based on his own misunderstanding of how trade deficits work, and threatening to escalate a trade war of continually retributive tariffs with China.

Engaging in international trade is a balancing act. The United States should keep our position at the head of the negotiating table so that we maintain our strategic interests across the globe and push for reforms and standards that other countries won’t, but we also need to use that same leverage to protect American workers. In the meantime, leaders in Congress and the executive branch need to provide meaningful and sustained trade adjustment assistance, including job re-training, incentives for new industries to replace jobs lost, educational opportunities, and more. Addressing the related question of automation will also hinge on a bold, generational vision for broad investments in education and training measures that provide continued opportunity and fairness for the American middle class.
Main Points

Well-crafted international trade agreements are important because they allow us to contain rivals and set the rules of the road; still, we need to ensure a fair shake for American companies and products. It is better for America when we lead on trade and shape the rules that all countries will have to abide by because our diplomats will fight for environmental protections, workers’ rights, and other key American values. If we opt out of the conversation, these critical issues will be ignored, and American workers, companies, and products won’t be represented; therefore, we need our negotiators in the room who will work to ensure that American workers, companies, and products are going to benefit.

*We can’t afford to sit on the sidelines while others set the rules and stack the deck against American workers, companies, and products. If we sit on the sidelines or only make unreasonable demands, other countries—who have no interest in our values or our economic success—will run the table.*

Trade wars—regardless of if they are with our allies or our rivals—are neither good nor easy to win. The Trump Administration has taken a very cavalier approach towards discussing trade with other countries. President Trump recently started a spat with our G7 allies over trade issues, and he previously directed his NAFTA negotiating team to make only maximalist demands (causing talks to stall out). Meanwhile, he has started to escalate an actual trade war with China, in which a back-and-forth of retaliatory tariffs will mean more expensive goods for consumers. All this rhetoric and trouble may seem easy now, but it could threaten real consequences for us on down the road—especially when it comes to allies that share our vital national security and economic interests.

*Talking tough may sound appealing, but the costs of any trade wars will be passed on directly to the American consumer. President Trump needs to be far more level-headed when dealing with our rivals, and keep from inflicting unnecessary damage on ourselves by attacking our allies.*

Congress can assist the executive branch in crafting better trade agreements by pushing for meaningful trade adjustment assistance, which will help tackle the related problem of automation. Trade adjustment assistance should be an essential component piece of any international trade agreement the United States enters into. Measures should include job re-training, incentives for new industries to replace jobs lost, educational opportunities, and other innovative steps to protect American workers, companies, and products. Similar steps are needed to address the challenge of automation, which results from technological advances and often exacerbates the same problems that trade agreements or immigrants are blamed for.

*Trade adjustment assistance—training, education, and incentives that work not just for American companies, but American workers—needs to be considered an essential part of any international trade agreements moving forward.*

At home and around the world, security and prosperity are intertwined—and that means that bluster, stubbornness, and incompetence won’t keep us safe or make us wealthy. We should expect our elected and appointed leaders to approach international trade agreements like any other diplomatic engagement: with a sense of intellectual seriousness, and a balanced consideration of our own national economic interests as well as broader values like environmentalism and human rights. Making threats or maximalist demands won’t get us anywhere. Instead, we should be pushing for outcomes that will do the most good because economic stability is tied to security in an increasingly connected world.
Aggressive rhetoric is easy on the campaign trail, but it won’t produce the results we need. In the post-World War II era, we’ve learned time and again that security and prosperity are tied together at home and abroad; we need to expect our leaders to approach these issues with seriousness and nuance.

Sample Debate Lines

**Opposition:** Time and again, we’ve gotten ourselves into the worst trade deals. From here on out, it needs to be America First—and if other countries won’t meet our demands, they’ll lose out on trade with us while we take care of our own and build an ever-stronger economy along the way.

**Response:** Security and prosperity are intertwined around the world, and most people do better when America is at the head of the negotiating table. We should stay engaged on international trade to check our rivals and set the rules of the road, work together with allies towards the common good, and ensure that American workers get a fair shake as well as preparation and resourcing for the 21st century economy.