

US Defense & Security Policy

Great Decisions February 23, 2008

Luke Nichter, PhD fellow in the history department at BGSU, began the Great Decisions session on February 23 by asking audience members if they had decided on a presidential candidate for the March 4 primary election. Most hands went up. Then he asked how many people were familiar with the defense and security policies of their candidate of choice. Only a few hands went up. Thus he illustrated that defense and security policies have not been a major theme during the primary campaign—domestic policies have been more discussed.

Nichter sees the three biggest defense and security policy challenges facing the US as nuclear proliferation, its relationship with China, and its relationship with Russia. The US still has the most powerful military, spending as much as the rest of the world combined.

The author of the companion reading offers three possible directions that US defense policy can take. One is to maintain American dominance through the use of pre-emptive military action, in which the US would probably be acting without partners. The second is for the US to use military power for deterrence and containment while forming coalitions with other nations. The third option is for US to work multilaterally with other nations, jointly addressing issues such nuclear proliferation, with the military being

one component of such cooperative efforts

Nichter believes the foreign policy of the next president, whether Republican or Democrat, will be different than that of the Bush administration. The next president may be more cautious about getting into another overt conflict. He sees the next president following a policy which is a combination of the three options above.

External factors affecting US defense and security policy include new leadership in Russia and in Europe, the emergence of China as a world power, and the probability of serious talks to reform the United Nations and NATO. The NATO alliance was formed to prevent war during the Cold War; with the Cold War over NATO needs to re-define itself.

The final Great Decisions talk will be on Saturday March 1 at 9:30 a.m. at the Wood County Senior Center. The topic will be “Latin America: Shift to the Left?” and the speaker will be Amilcar Challu from the history department at BGSU.

--Ellen Dalton