MISSION STATEMENT

Forum on American Progress is a nonpartisan student organization that aims to promote greater discussion of American foreign policy at MIT.
OUR VISION

Forum on American Progress (FAP) was established in 2005. Today, it comprises over 100 students who share a desire to explore the United States' role on the world stage. We aim not just to generate discussion of this subject among our own members, but also to extend that dialogue and debate to the entire MIT community: How can America sustain its leadership in a manner that advances the global community's progress? We host guest lectures by leading intellectuals and policymakers, run student panels on the prevailing issues of the day, organize screenings of important foreign policy documentaries, and coordinate with organizations across campus to illuminate the role that science, engineering, and technology play in American foreign policy.

Going forward, we want to continue these activities but also expand in new directions. For example, we plan to feature student blogs on our website. We also intend to partner with other student groups to host a conference of undergraduates from across the United States who are interested in solving global problems. Last but not least, we will work to have more MIT students' writing on American foreign policy issues published in leading newspapers and journals.

Our first step, however, is to publish this booklet, a copy of which will be sent to the next presidential administration. We will continue to showcase a diverse cross section of student opinion every year as a way of engaging the MIT community.

We welcome your thoughts and look forward to involving you in our work!

Cheers,

Manvi Goel '10
Member, FAP Executive Board
SPONSORSHIP

We wish to acknowledge the gracious supporters of this publication:

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We also wish to acknowledge Annie H. Liang ’11 for her extraordinary work in designing this publication.

Note: The opinions expressed within this publication do not necessarily reflect those of Forum on American Progress, its members, its advisors, or affiliates, or those of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
Dear Reader:

What is the most important challenge facing our world, and what should the United States do to solve it? Forum on American Progress invited 25 MIT students to answer this question in 250 words.

Many a prospective author commented that this word limit permitted them scant space in which to answer such a broad question — we agree. We did not want our writers to offer lengthy justifications of their views, but rather, short, compelling responses that would provoke.

The document that you hold in your hands, America in the World: MIT Speaks, showcases those responses: It is the first such publication at the Institute. The openness of the prompt elicited a rich diversity of responses. Some invoke abstract principles; others discuss concrete ideas. Some ask questions; others propose answers. Some are written colloquially; others employ formal prose. Some call on the United States government to take action; others argue that change must begin with the individual. Some address commonly discussed subjects in novel ways; others illuminate subjects that are receiving insufficient attention in mainstream media.

All of the submissions, however, ask us to think.

Although we conceived of this publication to coincide with this year's presidential elections, the question that motivates it does not become resonant only every four years; indeed, it requires our constant attention.

We hope, then, that America in the World inaugurates an annual tradition. It aligns well with the Dean for Undergraduate Education's strategic aim to "provide global educational opportunities that enable MIT students to appreciate and learn from other cultures," as it does with the broader "Go Global" currents at the Institute.

The problems that will define the 21st century are incredibly nuanced and complex, arguably without historical precedent. Fortunately, however, they call for a manner of objective reasoning that MIT students are uniquely enabled to apply. Such is the wonder of humankind that the ingenuity of our minds scales with the magnitude of our calling.

Here is to a better world for those who live now and the many more who will follow them.

Sincerely,

Ali S. Wyne '08

President, Forum on American Progress
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The greatest challenge facing the United States today is the need for sustainable energy. Rising carbon dioxide emissions, the ever-dwindling supply of oil and fossil fuels, the rapidly increasing world population, and the growing threat of global warming all indicate that conventional energy sources will be unable to meet the demands of the 21st century.

The federal government should seek both to improve existing energy technologies and develop alternatives to traditional fossil fuels. In addition to encouraging reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and higher fuel standards for our cars, Congress ought to increase funding for research into technologies that reduce our dependence on foreign oil, such as biofuels. Finally, the American people must insist that our next president makes energy a real priority in Washington, eventually molding the United States into a model of energy change for developed nations across the globe.

Paul F. Baranay (Course 20) is a Senator in the Undergraduate Association (UA), Co-Editor-in-Chief of the MIT Undergraduate Research Journal, and a MedLinks mentor. He is also a blogger for MIT Admissions.
Technology is diffusing at a dazzling rate. On the whole, this phenomenon translates to a better quality of life for people around the world. Thanks to the Internet, we can share information with people in a blink of an eye.

This convenience, however, comes at a cost. Everything needs electricity to run. Batteries need charging and plugs need plugging; no one stops to think about where the electricity for these devices is being generated. Electricity does not come from thin air, and we are running out of its sources. Why do people not realize that plugs are not magic portals that power their devices? Why are so many things energy inefficient?

The answer, of course, is the lack of education on such matters. No one cares how technology works as long as it does work, and this problem is compounded in a world where energy resources are depleting. The United States should take a more proactive stance on science and science education, especially where energy is concerned. The government recently slashed the science budget, a move that is especially counterproductive in light of the coming energy crisis. I am not just talking about science where energy is concerned, but all branches of it: Some of the world’s most important discoveries come from trying to solve a problem that is unrelated to the one at hand. The United States should also work more proactively to educate developing countries about efficiency since many of them use inefficient technology. We may be able to look towards a brighter world if we take needed steps here at home and abroad.
Biotechnology holds enormous promise for my continent's food security — the law is intimately involved in realizing that promise. Small farmers in Africa constitute the largest segment of food producers. However, frequent drought and extensive soil erosion endanger their conventional agricultural produce. Biotechnology enables us to manipulate seed DNA to increase yield and enhance resistance to pests, disease, and salinity and nitrogen deficiencies. Genetically modified crops would accordingly seem to offer a clear solution to Africa's conundrum.

The problem is that 98% of all genetically modified seed patents belong to six multinational companies, most of which are American corporations. Many African lawyers would argue that intellectual property rights (IPRs) provide quasi-monopolistic powers to foreign companies at the disadvantage of poor communities. On the other hand, granting inventors monopoly power in exchange for the effort that they put into creating their products has revolutionized seed technology and encourages companies to invest in research that ultimately benefits farmers and consumers across the world.

These issues raise complex, intersecting questions of rights and justice. Would stringent regional IPRs allow more genetically modified seed varieties to reach African agriculture? What impact would this phenomenon have on low-income farmers? Can moral pressure induce multinational corporations to make intellectual property allowances, as some HIV/AIDS drug manufacturers have? For these corporations, are the advantages of such allowances significant enough to compensate for the risk that they entail? The answers to these questions will have critical policy implications for generations of African farmers and Africa's long-term food security.

A native of Zambia, Raja H. R. Bobbili (Courses 6 and 14) is the Founder of iHouse, a house for students who are interested in global experiences, and the Founder of International Development Partners, a nonprofit society that he established to enable MIT students to conduct development projects in Africa. The Zambian government has commissioned Raja to write a manuscript that proposes policies for improving the country's welfare.
Justin M. Cannon (Course 6) is an Ambassador for the MIT-China Program and the Webmaster for the Public Service Center.

It is an enlightening exercise to imagine how the United States will be portrayed in the history books of 2500. Given the patriotic themes and media commentary that crowd our minds, it is difficult to imagine a chapter in a future textbook being entitled, "The American Triumph: 1990 — 2050."

Regardless of whether the next chapter is titled "The Multipolar World" or "The Rise of China," the United States is in control of how it will end, starting with the realization that it will end. We must be able to discuss a future in which America no longer possesses hegemony: This power shift will come not of its own debilitation, but of others' growing strength.

American intellectuals and politicians must avoid describing this changing landscape in the language of security or ideology. Global politics is often understood as zero-sum, making it particularly difficult for the king of the hill to watch contenders gain influence at the expense of his own. The new generation of American leaders must soften the rhetoric of their Cold War parents and avoid the temptation to simplify global power contests as fundamental security threats or attacks on American ideals. American leadership must be disciplined in engaging the evolving world, responding appropriately to real security threats while accepting gracefully that the era of American interventions and puppet governments is over. Eisenhower understood the dangers that confronted the United States in the postwar era, warning that "We will bankrupt ourselves in the vain search for absolute security."

For its own part, the American citizenry must embrace leaders who sacrifice economic prizes or overseas influence to save lives and promote peace.
The most important problem facing our world today is global poverty. Around the world — from Haiti to Pakistan, from the Tuareg rebellion in Niger to the humanitarian crisis in Darfur — poverty is responsible for the violence that has resulted in the death of millions. The biggest roadblock to alleviating it is the institutionalization that it has undergone. When the current world powers exploit their position to maintain a monopoly over global wealth, there is little that other countries, or even poor communities within those world powers, can do to move up the economic ladder.

Policies such as forcing countries to sell their resources at prices far below those of the market, or using political leverage to coerce countries into purchasing goods for higher prices than they could find elsewhere, ensure that poverty remains a perpetual problem.

Such institutionalization takes place on a smaller scale, but to a no less devastating effect, within many minority communities of wealthy nations. In the United States, for example, where public education is funded through community taxes, poor students are forced to attend under-funded schools, thereby attaining a second-rate education; those less-skilled students go on to earn low wages. This example is just one of many that demonstrate how the system is designed to maintain the status quo rather than encourage personal economic growth.

It is the duty of the United States, and all world powers, to examine both their internal and external policies, and work toward building a new sociopolitical framework that promotes their growth without stifling the economic potential of those who are lower down on the ladder. Only in this way will we be able to move towards a better, more peaceful world, because poverty anywhere is a threat to stability everywhere.

Mustafa G. Dafalla (Course 1) is a member of Malaria Solutions, an IDEAS Competition team that developed a malaria intervention solution in southwestern Niger using neem extracts as a larvicide. He is also the Co-Founder of Selsabila, a nonprofit organization that aims to bring inexpensive treadle-powered water pumps to Sudanese farmers.
Addressing Global Problems in a Sustainable Manner

Zahir A. Dossa (Courses 6 and 15) is the Founder of the Committee on Student Life Mentorship Program and a member of the Africa Internet Technology Initiative. He is also the Co-Founder of Selsabila, a nonprofit organization that aims to bring inexpensive treadle-powered water pumps to Sudanese farmers.

Unsustainable development is one of the biggest problems in the world today. Whether one considers global fuel shortages or poverty, America needs to start addressing her needs and those of the world in a more sustainable manner. When there is an oil shortage, we go abroad to find more oil as opposed to developing renewable and alternative energy sources here at home. When there are segments of the population that do not have the means to survive, we give them grants as opposed to empowering them to support themselves.

Founded on mobility, independence, and innovation, the United States must restore that vigor to the world in the 21st century. More time should be spent on developing novel solutions as opposed to jumping through bureaucratic hoops to implement short-term alternatives. It is the difference between a reactionary society that only fixes things once they go wrong and a progressive society that takes the right actions to prevent things from going wrong in the first place. Problems such as high carbon dioxide emissions and fuel shortages will only be addressed when they become imminent and unavoidable. However, much less money and effort could be expended if we developed sustainable solutions henceforth. In the forthcoming decades, it behooves America to undertake sustainable initiatives to solve global problems and serve as an exemplar for other nations.
Terrorism is one of the most formidable problems facing the world today. Despite spending billions of dollars and stationing thousands of troops in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq, the United States has been unable to contain the Taliban's insurgency. Its almost exclusively military campaign has compounded the problem by perpetuating sentiments of revenge and hatred. Confronting terrorism requires that we understand its roots.

Islam is a religion of peace — it does not condone indiscriminate acts of violence, like the murder of civilians that results from suicide bombings. The Taliban, and the militant jihadi ideology that it espouses, are rooted in late-19th century Saudi Arabia. The British befriended and empowered a puritanical Wahabi sect to overthrow the Ottoman Empire. Later, this primitive and intolerant faction of Muslims quoted Qur'anic verses out of context to suit their own agenda and recruit disillusioned, illiterate masses from some of the most destitute parts of the Islamic world. By the late 20th century, this misguided and uneducated militant branch had begun to initiate the wave of terrorism that is still rippling today.

One could take the approach of the Bush Administration — continue to spend billions of dollars fighting these masses — or one could attack the root causes: ignorance and illiteracy. If the United States takes an active role in building schools to combat the influence of extremist madrassas, it will inhibit recruiting attempts and foster alliances across the world. *Three Cups of Tea* tells the phenomenal tale of a mountain-climber turned social entrepreneur, Greg Mortenson, who has established over 60 schools within Northern Pakistan and Afghanistan to educate more than 30,000 children who would otherwise have been prime recruitment targets for extremist outfits. One school at a time, we can confront terrorism by introducing knowledge into the depths of ignorance and illiteracy where terrorism breeds.

*Adnan M. Esmail (Courses 2A and 15) is Treasurer for PaksMIT and an active member of the Energy Club.*
For thousands of years, women have gotten the short end of the stick — they still do today. Even in supposedly egalitarian societies like ours, subtle discrimination still exists — witness the glass ceiling. Elsewhere in the world, women live in far more dire straits: Systematic violence in war-torn countries, rape without recourse to justice, harsh laws and customs limiting their freedoms, less or nonexistent access to education, death during childbirth, and genital mutilation are but a few of the affronts to women's dignity.

This piece is not, however, a protest about how unfair this system is, but rather, about how counterproductive it is. Women make up approximately half of the world’s workforce — they represent an incredible resource, one that we are wasting. Imagine how much better off we would be if every woman on the planet were able to achieve her full potential in society, exercising her talents to advance her own well-being and that of her country’s economy. Where should we start?

Most obvious is a global need for basic provisions like food, clean water, healthcare, and safety, whether for women in inner-city America, a village in Darfur, or a South Asian brothel (there are thousands of organizations that are dedicated to these women — please donate). More important is the need to change cultural views of women. They will never get secure, permanent access to even these fundamentals if they are regarded as subhuman. The Western world, which has come closest to achieving gender equality, has a mandate to set an example. We must strive to eliminate all bias against women in our culture, particularly in the realm of global leadership. If American women could realize their full potential, perhaps the leaders of other countries would realize that their own women are human, and begin to treat them as such.
Global warming, famine, loss of crucial ecosystems...the world seems to be ending in so many different ways that we do not know what to do with ourselves. Luckily, there are scientists, activists, and politicians who are working hard to solve these problems. The world's most brilliant minds are being put to good use, attempting to understand how we can cope with the demands of a fast-paced civilization.

The reality, however, is that we have created most of these issues — issues that grow worse because most of us do not worry about them, instead thinking that others will solve them. The worst thing that we can do as a global society is to believe collectively that someone else will save the world. Such is not the case. Such has never been the case.

Many of the world's most pressing problems begin with the individual — in particular, we consume too much. I am going to repeat myself because people do not seem to want to listen when they hear this seemingly simple fact: We consume too much. We eat too much food, we use too much gasoline, we build houses bigger than we need, we consume too much, and then we expect scientists and others to solve problems that cannot be fixed, only managed.

What can the United States do? The United States: Not American presidents or the heads of the Departments of Energy and Agriculture, but the people of the United States themselves — what can they do? Everything.

Karen B. Figueroa (Course 11) is an active member of Amnesty International and a blogger for MIT Admissions.
One of the biggest problems facing the world's policy-makers is not material; policy lock-in decreases America's effectiveness in engaging countries that are involved in dynamic conflicts, and prevents new solutions from emerging in response to challenges such as Iranian policy.

In the past, the United States has interacted with Iranian presidents who were little more than figureheads. While the people have technically elected them, they have historically commanded little power, even domestically. Real power in Iran rests in the hands of its supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, a fact that gives us one reason to hope and two to fear. We can be reassured that President Ahmadinejad is merely a mouthpiece despite his blatant shortcomings as a member of the international community. We must worry, however, whether the power whom he represents — the Ayatollah — believes and supports his words, and whether any resolution to our conflict with Iran can come of talking to a politician who possesses no influence over foreign policy.

America should lead the international community by unlocking our old policies of not talking with Iranian presidents and enforcing their compliance with sanctions that disproportionately hurt civilians. Instead, it should open up diplomatic contact with the Ayatollah; and propose newer, smarter sanctions in the United Nations Security Council that are targeted more at the country's progressing military technology, and less at its populace, which could be an ally in stopping Iranian aggression abroad. Allowing for innovation in America's Middle East policy may allow for more elegant solutions to some of the world's most dangerous problems.
The most important challenge facing our world is the perverse, yet pervasive, presence of inequality. The rapid increase in our population and the strain that it puts on our planet's resources allow those with some access to manipulate the distribution of power and wealth, thereby causing greater inequality. The growth that we witness masks the underbelly of growing despair: Herein lies the dilemma of development. There are many consequences to this rising tide of inequality, including poverty, conflict, and terror.

In the past couple of decades, the United States could afford to be self-centered in its worldview. Indeed, we built an empire with a business-as-usual attitude. The time has now come that business cannot continue as usual; we must drop our pretension of hegemony and think of the world first. We need not do so for altruistic reasons, however; pursuing this course of action strengthens our position as well. Due to political, economic, and social inequities that are often attributed to American policy, there are many who feel, either consciously or subconsciously, that their growth is in our fall. The only way to derail such perilous ambition is to ensure that we empower those who are consigned to a Sisyphean life, which, while not lacking in its nobility, has no opportunity to experience the purpose of existence. As we move forward, let us build with others instead of building on them as we have done in the past.

Krishna K. Gupta (Courses 3 and 15) is outgoing President of the Sloan Undergraduate Management Association and Business Editor for the MIT International Review. He is also engaged in documentary filmmaking on the development of Nepal and independent research on the development of the Northeastern Indian state of Assam.
Microcredit gives the poor access to capital. Small loans, beginning at about $70, are given out on a yearly basis at interest rates of 20 – 40%, conditional on past year's repayment. Repayments occur in weekly installments.

Although the United States upholds this system as a panacea for the poor, it has largely failed to improve their condition, particularly in Bangladesh, where it first began on a large scale. The primary cause: The poor do not invest their loans into productive, income-generating activities. If the poor do not try, we say, it is not our problem.

The arrogance here is unbearable. As a country with such immense cultural (not just economic) influence, the United States must recognize that microcredit — a failing system — is a system that we designed. We seem to hold the microcredit system in high esteem because in it we see our cherished American Dream — writ large, scaled small. If you have capital, invest, reinvest, work hard, and one day you will strike gold.

But Bangladesh is hardly America. A $50 loan is useful for nothing that might generate income — it will buy three quarters of a goat or the first set of jewelry for your daughter's marriage dowry. Weekly installments are impractical since most productive businesses run on a seasonal schedule. High interest rates are little more than a guarantee to the loaner that he will get his money back, plus a little profit. Most importantly, the metric for success in Bangladesh is not necessarily an economic one. There are complex, nuanced social constraints and expectations that guide poor individuals when they request capital and use loans.

In this time of rapid globalization, the world's borders are open not only to the trade of technologies and goods, but also to the transfer of cultures and values. With this ease of entry, we carry into countries metrics of development that are based on purely Western values. If we fail to empathize with and adapt those metrics to the developing world, our hubris will render our efforts futile.
There are many problems facing the world: longstanding civil wars, an AIDS pandemic, violence against women, and a staggering inequity of access to clean water, healthcare, and education. And then there is climate change. We all know the predictions—increased heat waves, stronger and more frequent tropical storms, water shortages, and so forth—but have you thought about how those phenomena would exacerbate existing conflicts, famines, and poverty? The whole world will be harmed, but it will be the poor, the uninsured, the sick, and the hungry who will bear the brunt of climate change's consequences.

While this scenario may paint a grim picture for our planet's future, there is another side of this story. The climate crisis is a wake-up call for human civilization, and many have begun to respond to its call for cooperation, unity, and solidarity among diverse actors across the globe. This growing international movement seeks to use climate change as a rallying point to build a more equitable, just, sustainable world. It sees education for women, clean energy, economic equity—in short, components of social justice—as indispensable aspects of the fight against climate change.

The poor, it continues, should not only be insulated against impending threats, but also empowered to be a part of the solution. The United States, as one of the greatest socioeconomic forces in the world and as one of the greatest emitters of greenhouse gases, must take the lead in shifting the world onto a more sustainable path. Although the required transition is enormous, it can absolutely be achieved. If we embark in earnest, this half-century can be the one in which we reduce our carbon footprint by a factor of four, change our attitudes about material goods, and bring the basic trappings of human dignity to those who have never before had them.

Kendra D. Johnson (Course 1) is an active member of the Western Hemisphere Project, Share a Vital Earth, and the Generator Coalition. She also produces a weekly public affairs radio program, “Spherio,” for MIT’s radio station, WMBR 88.1FM.
Corruption is defined as "a departure from the original or from what is pure or correct." The nonprofit sector is a $1.1 trillion industry with over 19,000,000 full-time equivalent paid workers. With over $100 million of American taxpayers' dollars going to UNICEF alone, it is high time that we start demanding transparency from nonprofit organizations (NGOs).

Corruption can result from purposeful, careless, or ignorant actions. Many NGOs have been caught for misallocating funds. For example, UNICEF operated on a $1 billion annual budget with 25% of those funds never leaving its Manhattan headquarters, 40% used on its offices, and 10% - 20% spent on black holes. In addition, it was implementing "solutions" that potentially increased the transmission of HIV/AIDS. NGO corruption not only wastes money; it can also take lives.

Guidelines and codes of ethics for NGOs exist, but no organizations enforce them. The United States can establish stricter guidelines for, develop a stronger network between, and establish transparency among, these organizations. Although some laws bear on American NGOs, they are loosely enforced; it is individual donors who have the real power. Services like the Charity Navigator allow donors to analyze NGO activity. It is reasonable and important to demand annual reports from organizations to which one contributes. Alternatively, engineering a shift from nonprofit to for-profit public services promotes empowerment.

No one would deny that NGOs form an integral part of the global economy. However, hesitance to question their philanthropy has produced corruption, harming the communities that they claim to be helping, creating obstacles for legitimate NGOs, wasting funds, and sowing distrust of foreigners in developing countries. Demanding accountability from them would enhance their performance and the welfare of the communities who depend on them.
The most important challenge to the world in the next 15 years will be understanding how technology has changed, and will continue to change, the way that countries interact. Much like the Industrial Revolution, the Digital Revolution has changed many things about the way that we live and work. The United States needs to take the lead in comprehending how the technology boom will affect international agreements concerning the global economy, human rights, and warfare. It should be proactive in bringing these agreements into the 21st century and updating them to close any loopholes that technology creates. For instance, the global economy has become a digital playground, with telecoms and software companies leading the way. Outsourcing and an emphasis on worldwide accessibility will grow, and companies will become more international as the worldwide network infrastructure allows it.

Technology has also changed our living standards and cultural expectations about what it means to be repressed or impoverished. Most importantly, the face of warfare is changing; autonomous bots, UAV’s, secure communication networks, and a demonstrated ability by both the United States and China to destroy space satellites from the ground all demonstrate the need for new international agreements. Technology is good, but we must ensure that we have control over it before it becomes unmanageable.

**Steven M. Kelch (Course 6)** is President of Zeta Psi, UA Senate Representative to the UA Executive Committee, and an active member of SaveTFP.
Pundits and politicians often contemplate the problems of globalization, but rarely does anyone discuss the globalization of problems. In the last 100 years, local conflicts have blossomed into global wars, environmental disasters like Chernobyl have affected distant countries, and the impact of once-confined extremist groups is now felt worldwide. Last year, insufficient regulatory mechanisms in China killed over 100 people in Peru. Suddenly, someone's problems have become everyone's problems, and the international community has no mechanism for handling them.

The United States must attempt to convince regional powers of the importance of global cooperation. We need to lead by example and be willing to compromise our short-term economic interests to ensure the continuation of a stable economic framework for the next generation of entrepreneurs. No one nation can tackle problems like global warming, religious extremism, energy instability, and potential nuclear conflict by itself. Whether through the United Nations or other institutions that promote multilateral negotiations, the United States should demonstrate its dedication to tackling global issues and addressing their root causes — for example, widespread global poverty.

One great failure of the Bush Administration has been its unwillingness to admit that the United States does need other nations to succeed. The time for going it alone — has passed; the globalization of problems demands a globalization of solutions.
Imagine struggling against death, unable to win because your empty stomach protests. Imagine a Boeing 747 full of toddlers, crashing every three hours — equivalent to the number of people who perish from malaria during that time. Imagine dying under a scorching sun with your baby whimpering by your side, exhausted from knocking on car windows in busy intersections, begging for some money to eat.

Now stop imagining and look at reality: The misery that these atrocious images paint is still real.

The effects of poverty are seen throughout Africa, Southeast Asia, South America, and Latin America, where innocents struggle to survive everyday. They are also seen in the richest nations, hidden away in streets of skyscrapers, multimillionaire banks. Poverty is not just "their" struggle; it is a terror that challenges everyone on this globe as long as it persists. As the most powerful and influential nation in the world, the United States can and must end it.

What should we do? Be the leader that unites the key players in poverty alleviation: the governments, companies, nonprofit organizations, aid workers, and, most importantly, the people who need the help the most (the ones who have often been forgotten in this decades-long struggle). Reach out to the poor to figure out why half a century of foreign aid still leaves billions suffering. Do not just pump money into funds that may not always reach the people who are in need, whether because of corruption, broken infrastructure, or poor distribution channels. Do not create a system that allows reliance on charity. Increase funding for ideas and programs that will empower the poor to help themselves. The United States proudly proclaims itself a fighter for democracy and freedom in the developing world. To fight for others' freedom and rights, we need to open our eyes to the poverty that traps billions every day and implement sustainable policies to end it.

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Many of the pressing challenges that face the nations of the world — from terrorism to global hunger — share a common feature: the growing divide between those who have and those who do not. A disproportionate concentration of wealth is, in and of itself, neither unexpected nor immoral; indeed, this outcome prevails naturally in a free market that provides rewards in proportion to the quality of one's contribution. However, large-scale poverty and class segregation indicate a different problem, one that presents very real concerns for the global population.

The lack of quality employment opportunities combined with substandard living conditions provides a breeding ground not only for hunger and disease, but also for despair and resentment. Convincing an individual to engage in criminal or terrorist activities is much easier when he has "nothing to lose." This premise is just as valid in inner-city neighborhoods in the United States as it is in impoverished villages throughout the developing world. Simply redistributing wealth — through taxation policies, for example — is not a sustainable solution. Furthermore, economic prosperity does not need to be a zero-sum game: Everyone can be made better off through the creation of wealth, the most important element of which is arguably intellectual capital.

The United States, therefore, needs to promote better education and training programs for citizens so that they may develop and market their skills more effectively. Overhauling the current secondary educational system, which was developed for a fundamentally different economy, may be an appropriate starting point. Providing financial and human capital in less-developed parts of the world to aid the creation of new schools and basic infrastructure also seems quite sensible. The Internet should also be utilized as an affordable means of expanding access to information across the world, as seen with OpenCourseWare. Encouraging individuals to become productive members of society will be much easier given the right set of tools and incentives.
With rapidly developing nations adopting energy policies that are designed to maximize their growth, energy competition will become arguably the most important challenge facing the world. The United States must undertake to ensure a globally sustainable energy supply. Doing so involves reducing our domestic usage and restraining increases in energy demand in developing countries.

It is difficult to convince developing countries to adopt restrictive energy policies for two major reasons. First, compared to China and India, the United States uses over ten times as much energy per capita. Second, developing countries neglect efficiency considerations because reducing energy consumption would likely have a considerable impact on their economies; in contrast, developed countries possess the necessary resources to mitigate the consequences of increased investment in alternative sources.

Nevertheless, there are ways to convince developing nations to adopt sustainable energy policies. The United States can give or sell them technology, negating the costs that they would incur in the research and development process: Sharing nuclear technology with developing countries and encouraging them to develop fission facilities would have a significant impact on the global energy supply, but political considerations make this option unpopular. In addition, the United States can issue loans and grants to offset the high initial cost of building alternative and renewable fuel-based power plants. Finally, the United States can set an example by implementing efficiency regulations such as the CAFE standards.

As the world's largest energy consumer, the United States should ensure the responsible usage of worldwide energy resources. It is unreasonable to expect developing countries to adopt policies that hamper their development; consequently, the United States must negotiate to secure cooperation in working towards a globally sustainable energy future.

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One of the main problems that faces our world is the media, the main tool that shapes public opinion and engages in the manipulation thereof. It informs us of wars and acts of terror that are occurring in various parts of the world, but does it impart a human element to them? For example, the news today tells us that a blast killed 35 civilians — it does not even give them an identity. Reality is constructed for the bottom feeders in the news chain in such a way that language has become a form of vocabulary propaganda. It does not necessarily misinform on issues. Instead, it subtly interferes with the ability of the general public to think in a way that can lead to understanding.

Is it Western governments’ tool for gaining their citizens’ consensus to wage wars and sell weapons with the goal of maintaining "peace?" At least several hundred civilians die every week in war-torn regions, yet they sometimes do not even make it to the tenth page of the world’s leading newspapers. To the contrary, major news headlines often include news of celebrities who are entering rehab or shaving off their hair. This prioritization is as inverted as it is shameful. The global public must empower itself to the point where it recognizes that it has been a victim of propaganda and challenges received wisdom.
We are at a similar place to where America was in the 1970s; gas prices are rising, and renewable energy start-ups are springing up across the nation. Once more, Americans are looking to the energy gods to create a magical solution that will not inconvenience them or force them to change their energy consumption habits.

The context, however, is vastly different. The issue is no longer centered exclusively on petroleum supply and demand and geopolitical tensions. Now, there is much more at stake: our world and our people. The majority of scientists agree that global warming is a real, imminent threat to the safety and health of Earth and its inhabitants. Since greenhouse gas emissions are the greatest contributors to this problem, and such emissions come from fossil fuel combustion, we need to find sustainable energy sources to replace fossil fuels.

In the United States, energy conservation, and even more importantly, behavioral change, are key to making this transition. If technologies change in the absence of an attitudinal shift, we will still have issues with energy and the environment. We are waiting around for a savior energy technology, but behavioral change is something that can and must happen now. This problem is neither the government's nor the Environmental Protection Agency's; it is ours, and if we want the United States to make necessary changes to its infrastructure, we should start by making necessary changes in our daily lives.

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The biggest challenge that our world faces is the shortsightedness of nations that, failing to focus on long-run growth and adopting skewed views of their own societies, tend to misallocate their resources. Indeed, how could a corrupt government that is waging wars and dealing with drug cartels find the resources to open AIDS clinics or limit factory emissions? Instead of investing in non-sustainable charities, we must stimulate growth and find long-term solutions by using money more efficiently.

This task is difficult since determinants of growth vary even by locality. The United States and its allies should invite the brightest young minds of every nation to learn about their own individual histories and put together a complete picture of their countries’ respective situations. A two- or three-year program of this nature, sponsored by privileged countries and international institutions but free of Western biases and Coca-Cola advertisements, would give attendees the chance to discuss the latest innovations in growth policy and economics. They would then craft detailed plans, including specific goals for each of the next 20 years, tailored precisely to their respective countries’ sociopolitical climates.

These proposals, when put into place, would stabilize governments and establish their priorities. Furthermore, the focus on one's own country would decrease the tendency for powerful countries to impose their values on others, and for outsiders to focus their attention on projects that are ultimately of no value to them. Clear goals would decrease people's fears of an uncertain future, and finally, countries could sustainably and independently deal with the domestic crises that they face.
We are reaching a pivotal point in history when, for the first time, the majority of the population is expected to live in urban areas. Globally, more than 75% of future urban growth is expected to occur in already crowded slums. According to a 2003 United Nations HABITAT report, slums are sites of extreme inequality, places where people cannot secure key necessities such as water, durable housing, even a nearby toilet. This problem does not only afflict the developing world; American communities are experiencing the pressures of crowding, poverty, and diminishing green space.

If the future of our planet is indeed an urban one, we need to see greater leadership from scholars and politicians in the field. Those who are responsible for shaping our built environment and city infrastructure have not been as innovative as they can be, a reality that is costing communities extra tax dollars and causing them great environmental harm. With rising carbon dioxide emissions and shrinking freshwater reservoirs, the option of designing environmentally sustainable cities to manage a population of over 6.6 billion is no longer a luxury.

Domestically, we need to adopt progressive legislation and pay greater attention to urban issues. Internationally, the USAID should take a more aggressive approach in addressing urban issues via leadership and information sharing, as opposed to its current stance of providing "catalyst funding" to outside groups.

America should care about rapid urbanization because it involves human rights; because it is the source of environmental degradation via pollution, depleted water tables, and deforestation; and because slums are breeding grounds for crime and terrorism. The future of our cities, as with many phenomena, presents both a challenge and an opportunity.

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These problems are enormous. The largest challenge facing our world, however, lies not in solving them, but rather, in mustering the collective will to do so. Our greatest problems are not the clear responsibility of a single individual. Furthermore, they are distant from our daily lives. In a highly individualistic country, we focus on distinguishing ourselves from every other creature on the planet rather than understanding how we contribute to the whole. How can a meritocracy respond to the demands of its time when it prizes individual heroic efforts over sustained collective effort?

The necessary solutions will not emerge through a revolution in ideas or systems, but rather, through an evolution of human consciousness and the systems that define the individual's interactions with society. The real question, then, is how to make the aforementioned problems resonant for the individual. Specifically, how can we leverage political, legal, commercial, and educational channels to make them personal? Immediate? Essential?

Three channels, in particular, mold human consciousness: education, media, and business. Education can inspire and equip youth to undertake projects with novel approaches, renewed enthusiasm, and profound responsibility. Media builds off of this foundation to make the world and its challenges both salient and accessible. It also plays a pivotal role in deciding which issues are considered important and documenting how individuals can take action on them as responsible global citizens. Finally, business possesses ever-increasing power to effect tremendous change, and with this power the great responsibility to do so. The United States needs to incentivize and demand a shift in the way that businesses treat people and the environment. Depending on the speed at which it can accommodate these shifts, there may be a need for a third sector beyond "for-profit" and "non-profit," one that some already refer to as "for-benefit." For-benefit organizations try to address social and environmental challenges through business solutions, and should be accommodated with a legal structure that allows them do so effectively.

Global challenges have the potential to be global opportunities that join us together and redefine the way that we live. Realizing that potential demands that we push for an evolution in human consciousness: As that process unfolds, we will recognize that "solutions" to problems are properly regarded not as ends unto themselves, but as a way of living.
John Milton concludes Book Five of *Paradise Lost* with "the insight that judgment, turned away from the recognition of inmost crimes, will tend hereafter to operate more accurately with respect to the other than with respect to the self." While that recognition precludes me from answering the question as it is posed, it compels me to attempt, however feebly, to revive our "fallen" sense of judgment so as to reveal to us our own self.

As much as we love our world, and feel the urge to respond to the call to serve it as best as we can, why do we take an indifferent approach to our problems that places us completely outside the sphere of responsibility for our disasters? Are we not a part of the problem? Our idiosyncratic national, religious, ideological, and social associations divide us, creating the tensions and wars that we all so abhor.

I do not regard a nation or a religion or a creed or a culture as wholly responsible for any of the major problems that we face today. Human beings are far too disunited to operate as one unit on a global scale with identical motivations. Very few people make the decisions that are responsible for the mess that follows — it is those individuals whom I address here. One day, you may be among those chosen few, presented with a choice between killing innocent civilians and killing more innocent civilians: Which would you choose?

What can America do? What would America do? I cannot say. America *should*, however, recognize how many problems it is responsible for in today's world. It should discontinue the policies that create said problems and renounce the decisions that give rise to those policies in the first instance. The rest of the world will fix itself.

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*A native of Pakistan, Saad Zaheer (Courses 8 and 18) is a member of the Varsity Squash team.*