

# Global Agenda Council on the United States 2012-2014



## Understanding/Context

In the second half of the 20th century, the United States and its allies sought to uphold global order, provide strategic leadership and military strength, and underwrite stability through assistance for reconstruction and development. With mixed results, the US has shouldered the bulk of responsibility for maintaining order and a stable balance of power in the world. Meanwhile, the beginning of the 21st century has been dynamic and, in many ways, challenging for the United States. The US remains the world's foremost military power, yet a shift appears to be taking place in geopolitical terms, especially as the country confronts the threat of terrorism. The situation is further compounded by a shift in the economic centre of gravity from developed to developing nations. At the same time, the US has experienced its deepest recession in 70 years and, although measures were in place to force the hand of legislators, the medium-term outlook remains uncertain.

## Shaping the Agenda

During the past year, the Global Agenda Council on the United States has discussed the role of the US in the world and how it should position itself in the future. The Council's basic premise characterizes the US as being in a situation of flux. Prevailing public opinion and budget constraints inside the country create the perception by some of a nation that is retreating from the international stage. This perception is all the more intriguing as it occurs during a time many world leaders would welcome an enlightened US foreign policy that is engaged and active on a variety of fronts.

**“Through a series of curated conversations around the globe, the goal of the Council**

**is to ask a specific question: How can US power and influence best be deployed to create a win-win outcome that serves the interests of the United States while addressing the needs and wishes of the region in question?”**

The perspectives captured from Forum stakeholders around the globe, collected on the margins of its meetings and activities, offer a unique data set from which to draw certain conclusions. The confusion surrounding US intentions with respect to Syria, rising questions on the National Security Agency's data and security practices, and the seemingly blasé attitude that so many political leaders held towards a government shutdown and default have left many to question the role of the US in a global context. As a result, the Council found itself increasingly using the term “dual ambivalence”, to reflect how many inside the United States are approaching engagement with the outside world while the rest of the world feels equally split in terms of its view of the United States.

## Contact Information

**Research Analyst:** Stefan Hall, Associate, Global Agenda Councils, [stefan.hall@weforum.org](mailto:stefan.hall@weforum.org)

**Council Manager and Forum Lead:** Paul Smyke, Special Adviser to the Chairman and Senior Director, North America, [paul.smyke@weforum.org](mailto:paul.smyke@weforum.org)