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OPENINGS FOR FRAMING A PROGRESSIVE FOREIGN POLICY  
Key Results from New Open Society Institute Research  
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Even at a time of elevated support for current national security policies, the public still has deep reservations about those policies, which creates an opening for groups advocating a different course for American foreign policy. The public is particularly receptive if such groups frame the elements of an alternative foreign policy – such as development assistance, human rights, and a responsible energy policy – in a way that bears some relation to the “hard” security agenda of issues such as Iraq and terrorism.

Although public support for the current national security policies is up somewhat in the wake of recent events, such as the capture of Saddam Hussein and the increased national threat level during the holiday period, the public still is troubled by many aspects of current U.S. foreign policy. The public worries that we have alienated other countries at the expense of America’s security and spent too much time and money on foreign affairs at the expense of domestic priorities. Moreover, clear majorities of the public have not been convinced about the core concepts of current U.S. national security policies, such as the necessity of pre-emptive military attacks and unilateral American action abroad.

Given these concerns progressive groups and speakers have opportunities to frame their messages in ways that resonate with a majority of the public. This research was undertaken to determine the best ways to move an internationalist policy agenda forward; its findings help leaders of progressive NGOs and legislators frame their message in the most persuasive way. In addition to framing their issues in some relation to the “hard” security agenda, progressive groups and speakers need to take several steps in order to present their issues in the most powerful manner:

- ***Getting the argument right.*** Progressive groups and speakers can do more to push back on current foreign policy if they use the right arguments. For example, the public responds more strongly to arguments against the concept of pre-emption when based on “the long-standing American tradition” of not attacking others unless the U.S. is attacked first, rather than on the argument that pre-emption could make the U.S. look like a “global bully” and therefore alienate other countries.
- ***Audience matters.*** Some choices about the message frame for progressive foreign policy priorities depend heavily on the audience. For example, on the ques-



tion of pre-emption, conservatives respond more to an argument against the concept of pre-emption when it is based on the “American tradition” of not attacking first; while self-identified liberals respond more to the argument that pre-emption risks making the U.S. look like a “global bully.”

- ***A few variables differentiate the public’s reactions.*** A small number of variables sharply differentiate public reactions to many elements of the progressive agenda, particularly gender, education (both years of schooling and exposure to the world through foreign travel), and location (particularly the coasts as opposed to rural heartland areas).
- ***A sizeable foundation of support for a foreign policy premised on more than fear.*** Although there is elevated support for current national security policies, a surprisingly large share of the public shows a desire for a foreign policy that is premised not just on fear, but also on a desire to build a peaceful and more prosperous world. Nearly half the public says this is a unique moment for America to pursue this kind of foreign policy.

These are among the key findings of a baseline survey for the Open Society Institute’s Global Cooperative Engagement project. The survey was based on telephone interviews with a random nationwide sample of 1,290 civically engaged adults, including a sample of 439 foreign policy opinion formers (college educated, follow international affairs closely), conducted December 15-20, 2003. The survey results are subject to a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.4 percent. The survey questionnaire was informed by the results of a set of focus groups in Seattle, Washington; Des Moines, Iowa; and Washington, DC, conducted December 8-11, 2003. All participants were civically engaged adults; the Washington groups were composed of opinion formers.

### **Despite Post-Saddam Support, Doubts About Current U.S. Foreign Policy**

Even at a moment of somewhat elevated support for current U.S. national security policies, the American public still has serious doubts about the current approach to world affairs, which creates openings for groups proposing progressive and alternative foreign policy agendas. The survey, in particular, was conducted at an unusual moment: it began two days after Saddam Hussein was captured, and finished the day before the national threat level was raised to Orange.

Saddam’s capture (along with positive economic news during this period) helps generate a 9 percent drop since mid-November in the share who see the country headed in the wrong direction [Figure 1], and a 5 percent rise in the share who feel that Iraq has been worth the cost of U.S. lives and dollars, up to 51 percent. [Figure 2.] It also helps raise the share who feel the country is safer than three years ago – up 9 points since August, to a 52 percent majority. [Figure 3.] The share who see the country safer since 9/11



– in many ways, the more relevant point of reference – is even higher: up 5 points since August, to 66 percent. [Figure 4.] In part, these figures suggest that progressive groups and speakers are swimming against public opinion if they attack current policy on the grounds that it has made the U.S. “less safe.”

The current national security policies also enjoy a relatively high degree of support at this moment because the public – despite Saddam’s capture – remains focused on terrorism and other “hard” security concerns, relative to other foreign policy issues. Four of the five top foreign policy and national security concerns for the public right now fall into this category, including: keeping America’s military strong (cited as extremely or very important to America’s well-being by 88 percent of respondents); controlling biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons and material (88 percent); fighting global terrorism (81 percent); and strengthening America’s homeland security (73 percent). Among the list of progressive issues, only “fighting global diseases, like AIDS and tuberculosis” (77 percent) and “reducing America’s dependence on Middle East oil” (72 percent) approach the same levels of concern (we return to these issues later). [Figure 5.]

Yet even with these dynamics that tend to raise support for current security policies – such as Saddam’s capture and a continuing focus on terrorism and hard security issues – the public still shows a striking level of doubts about the direction of U.S. policies abroad. Five concerns in particular dominate the public’s outlook:

***Deterioration of America’s image abroad.*** First, the public is highly concerned that America’s current foreign policies hurt our image abroad, which undermines our own national security. A 51-17 percent majority believes the U.S. is less rather than more liked and respected abroad than a few years ago – about the same result as we found in August 2003.<sup>1</sup> The public worries that the decline in America’s image is a dangerous trend, with a very strong 84 percent saying that the degree to which other countries like and respect us is important for our own foreign policy and national security. [Figure 6.] This concern, which is closely tied to worries about the U.S. acting too much on its own abroad, emerges strongly in the focus groups as well; as one woman in Seattle says: “despite all of the things we give to other countries, the money, the food, whatever, Americans are still not looked on well in other countries. Many countries dislike us. They hate us even. And that concerns me.”

***Doubts about the truthfulness.*** Second, the public exhibits a strong concern that it is not getting the truth about aspects of current foreign policy. Nearly a quarter of the public (22 percent) ranks “Not telling us the truth, like on Iraq and weapons of mass destruction” as one of their top two concerns (chosen from a list of 10 options) about current U.S. foreign policy – the second strongest concern on the list. [Figure 7.] While the

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<sup>1</sup> In a March 2003 survey we conducted jointly with Public Opinion Strategies for the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, we found a 55 percent majority of civically engaged respondents thought the U.S. was less liked and respected than a year ago, and fully 81 percent felt it was important to our national security that other countries like and respect the United States.



concern about honesty mostly relates to Iraq and weapons of mass destruction, it bleeds into other issues as well.

***Public divided on Iraq, pre-emption, unilateralism.*** Third, even at a point of relative strength for current U.S. foreign policy, a clear majority of the public remains unconvinced about the conceptual pillars of our foreign policy, such as the Iraq war, and the principles of pre-emption and unilateralism. In other words, even at a moment when the public applauds certain results of U.S. foreign policy, such as the capture of Saddam, it is still split over the rationales.

As noted earlier, only a slim 51 percent majority feels the war in Iraq has been worth the cost – even in the immediate aftermath of Saddam’s capture. Similarly, on the idea of pre-emption, the public splits only narrowly in favor when presented with contrasting statements for and against the concept, 50-46 percent (which we discuss further below).<sup>2</sup> [Figure 8.] In the same way, the argument for greater reliance on unilateral action earns only a 49-46 percent plurality. [Figure 9.] Concerns over the United States’ go-it-alone approach emerge with particular force in the focus groups; as a man in Des Moines says: “I think we’ve isolated ourselves from the rest of the world. Basically, we’ve shoved our super power down the throats of some countries and tried to with other countries who’ve resisted.”

***American over-extension.*** The fourth concern about current U.S. foreign policy – although it is also a potential obstacle for advocates of an alternative foreign policy as well – is the sense that the U.S. is over-extended abroad, spending too much time and money on foreign problems and too little on problems at home. The view is less outright isolationism, and more a desire for “minimalist internationalism” – a feeling that the U.S. has a role to play abroad, but that it should not do too much. In particular, the public is troubled by the sense that the U.S. is acting too much on its own in world events, which they sense leads to higher costs, and they express a desire for greater cooperation with other countries in addressing security challenges. That feeling is likely exacerbated right now by lingering reactions to a slow economy and the costs and casualties of the Iraq war.

The public’s third strongest concern about current U.S. foreign policy is that we are “spending too much time and money on problems abroad,” cited by 18 percent as one of their top two concerns. [Figure 10.] Also, by a 51-40 percent majority, the public says “we should focus more on problems in our own country like health care and education, rather than devoting so many resources to foreign aid to help other countries” (and rejects an alternative statement that says, “September 11 shows that as we must attend to problems at home, we also cannot ignore problems like poverty, repression, and extremism in other countries, and need to play an active role with other countries to address them”).

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<sup>2</sup> In testing the concept of pre-emption, all respondents hear one argument in favor of pre-emption; different half samples hear two different arguments in opposition; the figures here represent the average result.



[Figure 11.] Similarly, nearly two thirds of civically engaged adults find it very or somewhat convincing that, “With millions of Americans lacking a job or health insurance, we have enough problems at home – we can’t afford to keep spending so much time and money rebuilding other countries, like the additional 87 billion dollars just approved for Iraq.” Unlike the issues of pre-emption and unilateralism, support for focusing more on problems at home cuts across party, as well as gender.

This concern that we are over-extended abroad emerges in the focus groups, both in terms of money and casualties in global engagements:

*It seems like we are not focusing on our own people as much. We are playing the commandant of the world a lot of times. And we spend a lot of money over in Iraq and those places, and it doesn’t seem like we are paying as much attention to the problems we have here. We are billions and billions of dollars into debt and it’s kind of like, why are we still paying for that? [Seattle Men]*

*It [a statement in favor of engagement abroad] kind of made me go back to well, that’s nice that we spend globally, but what are we spending here at home? I mean we still have poverty here. We still have our problems. It almost offended me in a way. Sorry. [Washington, DC Women]*

It is worth noting which foreign policy dynamics *do not* greatly concern the public at this point. In particular, there is very little concern that the United States is “resorting to military actions too quickly” (cited by only 10 percent as one of their two strongest concerns, the second least cited concern), or that we are “spending too much on the military” (cited by 4 percent, the least cited factor). Indeed, there is a strong concern that we are “under-funding our military” (the *most* cited concern, at 23 percent), although some focus group comments suggest this view is tied to the feeling of American over-extension we discussed earlier – that is, a sense that the U.S. has deployed its troops to too many places at once, with too little assistance from allies and friends abroad, resulting in the military’s resources being stretched too thin.

### **Progressives Start with Good Standing**

These concerns about current U.S. policies abroad create a range of opportunities for individuals and groups who advocate a progressive foreign policy agenda, even in the face of elevated support for current security policies. It is also worth noting that the public starts with a relatively favorable view of the constellation of progressive foreign policy groups and their issues. Although opinion is divided along ideological lines in many cases, the progressive community mostly starts out as “good guys” in the debate over the country’s priorities abroad.



Although the U.S. military is by far the most popular player in the realm of America's global activities (a mean rating of 86 degrees on a 0-100 "thermometer" scale to measure favorability), the public views most kinds of progressive foreign policy groups in solidly favorable terms, including "groups that work on global poverty and development" (62 degrees); "human rights groups" (60 degrees); and "groups that work on the global environment" (58 degrees). Specific organizations and agencies that work on progressive issues also generally receive favorable marks, including the Peace Corps (69 degrees); UNICEF (64 degrees); and CARE (59 degrees). Both Amnesty International (50 degrees) and Greenpeace (47 degrees) receive slightly lower ratings, in large part because opinion on these groups is polarized along lines of ideology. [Figure 12.]

Additionally, the public generally sees the issues these progressive groups are addressing as important. As noted earlier, around three quarters of the public sees "fighting global diseases, like AIDS and tuberculosis" (77 percent) and "reducing America's dependence on Middle East oil" (72 percent) as extremely or very important for America's well being. Majorities also recognize the importance of human rights (65 percent); promoting health and education in poor countries (55 percent); contributing to international relief efforts (56 percent); and combating global warming (51 percent). [Figure 13.] In the post-9/11 world, the American public does not place such issues at the top of its security priorities, but they nonetheless see them as important, which opens the door for progressive groups to argue that they are being neglected, as we describe below.

### **Getting Heard: The Importance of a Hard Security Frame**

The research provides several insights on how progressive groups and speakers can capitalize on their favorable standing to get heard in the current opinion environment. The first and most important insight is that, when addressing the general public, they generally benefit from presenting their issues in some relation to the "hard" security agenda of terrorism and homeland security that is so much on the public's mind at this point. The research examines the impact of presenting progressive issues in three different message frames:

- Talking about the issue by itself, on its own merits (which we shorthand as the "A alone" message frame)
- Talking about the hard security agenda first, and then pivoting to the progressive agenda. ["A + B"]
- Arguing that the progressive agenda itself actually helps to advance the "hard" security agenda – for example, that combating poverty abroad will ease the conditions that contribute to extremism and terrorism. ["A = B"]



To explore this question, we conduct a set of controlled experiments across three sets of issues: development assistance, global warming and human rights. On each issue, we randomly assign our survey respondents to one of the three groups. One hears an “A alone” message on that issue; one hears an “A+B” message; one hears an “A=B” message. Although the results differ somewhat across the three issues, across all of them, the public is more receptive when we frame the progressive issue in some relation to the hard security agenda. It is worth reviewing the results in each of the three issue areas.

**Development assistance.** As Table One indicates, the public is most responsive to arguments in favor of development assistance when they are preceded by some mention of the hard security agenda – the “A+B” formulation. The “A alone” development message, which makes the case for such assistance in its own right, performs worse than both of the other formulations, which frame development assistance in some relation to the hard security agenda, with only a bare majority (51 percent very or somewhat convincing) supporting the “A alone” version, compared to 67 percent supporting the “A=B” formulation, and 77 percent supporting the “A+B” approach. The dominance of the A+B formulation holds true across the key dividing lines of gender and education.

**Table One: Three Alternative Message Frames on Development Assistance**

Message Frame	% “very” or “somewhat convincing”
<b>“A alone”:</b> <i>Right now, the U.S. spends less per person on relieving global poverty, hunger, and disease than most major countries. As one of the world’s richest countries, we should do much more to help relieve suffering abroad.</i>	<b>51%</b>
<b>“A+B”:</b> <i>In the wake of 9/11, our top priority is to strengthen homeland security and fight terrorism; but even as we do, we cannot forget about the other things we need to do in the world like helping to relieve global poverty, disease, and repression.</i>	<b>77%</b>
<b>“A=B”:</b> <i>Poverty and repression in places like Afghanistan can create a breeding ground for religious extremism and terrorism. By joining with other countries to fight global poverty, we can also help solve root causes of terrorism and make ourselves safer.</i>	<b>67%</b>

**Human rights.** It is striking how much impact all three of the human rights messages have; this is an issue with particular resonance. Even so, as Table Two shows, the strongest formulation here again is “A + B” – which says that while the U.S. works to root out terrorism, we must also speak out for human rights and religious freedom. A strong 83 percent of the public feels the following statement is very or somewhat convincing. While the dominance of the “A+B” formulation holds for both men and women, the “A alone” frame – arguing human rights on its own merits – proves to be about



equally strong with Independents and among respondents with a high school education or less.

**Table Two: Three Alternative Message Frames on Human Rights**

Message Frame	% “very” or “somewhat convincing”
<i>“A alone”</i> : The U.S. needs to speak out against regimes like Burma and China that violate human rights for women, political dissidents, and religious minorities. If we don't speak out for freedom, these issues too easily get ignored.	77%
<i>“A+B”</i> : Our work for security and freedom should go hand-in-hand. While we root out al Qaeda and the other terrorist networks, we also need to speak out for the kinds of human rights and religious freedoms that make us admired in much of the world.	83%
<i>“A=B”</i> : We should increase our efforts for human rights and religious freedom in other countries in part because free societies don't spawn the extremism and violence that can threaten us. By combating repression we can reduce the threat of terrorism.	70%

**Global warming and energy.** On global warming and energy, once again the strongest approach is to present the issue in some relation to the “hard” security agenda. In this case, however, there is great power in the “A=B” approach – arguing that by developing alternative energy sources, we will not only help reduce global warming, but reduce our vulnerability to Mideast instability as well. This argument is convincing to 87 percent of respondents – the strongest of any arguments made in the survey, either on behalf of current U.S. policies or progressive alternatives. The strong response to this argument – which reinforces earlier, similar findings from our surveys for the Democracy Corps project\* – provides particularly strong evidence that, even now, progressive groups and speakers can get a full hearing on their issues if they frame their issues in the best way. The dominance of the “A=B” frame, which emphasizes the link between alternative energy and less dependence on the Mideast, holds true across lines of ideology, gender, and education.

\* The Democracy Corps August 2003 survey found that 75 percent of civically engaged respondents found it very or somewhat convincing that the war in Iraq proves we need an energy policy which invests in alternative sources of energy – making the U.S. less dependent on the Mideast and their oil.



Table Three: Three Alternative Message Frames on Global Warming and Energy

Message Frame	% “very” or “somewhat convincing”
“ <b>A alone</b> ”: <i>We need to combat global warming or else it may change global weather and increase flooding in major cities in the coming decades. The U.S. produces a quarter of the world's carbon pollution, and needs to help lead the way to a solution.</i>	66%
“ <b>A+B</b> ”: <i>The immediate threat to our security comes from terrorism and dangerous regimes with deadly weapons. But we also need to keep our eye on longer-term dangers, like global warming, which could cause major destruction in the future unless we take action.</i>	70%
“ <b>A=B</b> ”: <i>The war in Iraq proves we need an energy policy to make us less dependent on oil from the unstable Middle East. Developing alternative fuels, like solar, hydrogen, and wind power, will increase our energy security while helping combat global warming.</i>	87%

Our focus groups suggest that this message makes participants receptive to arguments about global warming by placing the issue in a new frame that is linked to their current concerns about the Mideast. As one Seattle woman says: “I’ve been so lukewarm on most of the other [statements]. But this one, it said the war in Iraq proves that we need an energy policy. As in, like a strategy, a focus, a plan that makes us less dependent on oil from the unstable Middle East. In my opinion, that’s the most honest thing I’ve seen here. That’s why we went in. It had a lot to do about oil. And so we are kind of killing two birds with one stone. And also addressing global warming.” Similarly, a woman in one of our Washington, D.C. opinion former focus groups says: “The thing that really made me [agree] so strongly ...[is that] we need an energy policy that makes us less dependent on oil from overseas. And, after I read that then the global warming just seemed like it would be a great thing to go along with it.”

At least across these three sets of issues, progressive messengers get the strongest response when they frame their issues alongside the hard security agenda. The comments from focus group participants help to explain why. Terrorism and Iraq are on the public’s mind, and Americans want some acknowledgement that these are the top priorities right now. Once that idea is expressed, however, the public becomes more receptive to the notion that America’s foreign policy agenda must encompass a broader range of issues in order to address the full range of global challenges. It is partly a matter of connecting with the public’s sense of priorities. As a woman in Iowa states: “I think our main priority is protecting ourselves. That’s the bottom line. Clear and simple.” Similarly, a woman in Seattle suggests the need for a kind of sequencing – security before good



deeds: “Somewhere you have to have a strength and a basis – if we can be strong and unified and ward off terrorism, then there is a basis we can work from [in the rest of the world].”

As a result of such sentiments, there is a danger that if progressive groups and speakers are mute on the hard security agenda, they will gain less of a hearing than they otherwise might. It may well be that the need for this kind of a frame will change over time, particularly if concerns about terrorism and Iraq recede. Moreover, the optimal frame depends on the issue: a hard security frame emerges as less essential on human rights; on energy, there is particular credibility to asserting that alternative fuels may help reduce our vulnerability to Mideast instability. This is not a one-size-fits-all exercise; but the results do suggest that the public is generally more receptive to the progressive agenda when progressive groups and speakers also take some steps to address current concerns over terrorism, Iraq, and other aspects of the “hard” security agenda.

### **Other Implications for Framing a Progressive Foreign Policy**

The research points to five additional insights for framing messages on progressive foreign policy priorities in the current environment.

***The opportunity for stronger progressive arguments: the example of pre-emption.*** First, there are real opportunities to build on the doubts that substantial portions of the public have with key elements of the current foreign policy framework. For example: we noted before that opinion is divided on the idea of pre-emption; but with the right message frame, it is possible to generate stronger opposition to that concept. Many observers have argued against pre-emption by arguing that if the U.S. acts pre-emptively we may look like a “global bully”; yet this argument loses in a match-up against a statement in favor of pre-emption, by a 41-54 percent margin. An alternative approach does significantly better: by emphasizing that pre-emption goes against the “long-standing American tradition” of not attacking until we are attacked or imminently threatened, this approach generates a clear 51-46 percent majority *against* pre-emption. [Figure 14.]

***Audience matters.*** The second point is that the best message frame for progressive foreign policy ideas often depend heavily on the audience – whether one is talking to the general public, opinion formers, activists, or experts. For example, on the question of pre-emption, as we just saw, when addressing the public as a whole, it is more effective to appeal to the tradition of not attacking first, rather than warning that the U.S. risks looking like a bully. However, the effectiveness of this approach derives from its stronger appeal to moderates and conservatives (which makes sense: tradition is a conservative notion). Yet, for a liberal audience – a group of activists, perhaps – it is significantly more effective to argue that a policy of pre-emption risks alienating other countries. [Figure 15.] While the current research did not try to identify the optimal message



frame for all combinations of issues and audiences, it does underscore the importance of matching one's approach to the audience at hand.

**Long-term investments in capacity.** Third, the research points to an important insight about messages on development assistance – the potential power of messages that emphasize the value of long-term capacity building. A message that emphasizes “investments that help people in other countries help themselves over the long term” emerges as somewhat more effective than one that stresses the imperative of responding to famines, disasters, and epidemics (83 percent very or somewhat convincing for the former message, versus 78 percent for the latter message). The difference is even greater among opinion formers (87 versus 80 percent). While the survey reveals only minor differences in impact from referring to help for other countries as “development assistance” rather than “foreign aid,” the concept of teaching people how to help themselves strikes a chord. As a woman in one of our Iowa focus groups says: “Teaching them how to take care of themselves helps them more in the long run, and helps our country better in the long run.”

**Key drivers of opinion: gender, location, and education.** Fourth, the research underscores that there are a few basic drivers of the public's reactions to messages about progressive issues. The most powerful are gender, location and education.

- **Gender.** Another key driver is gender; as we have found in past research, gender differences explain a great deal of opinion differences on a range of national security and foreign policy issues. Relative to men, women are more worried about security (39 percent of women feel less safe than three years ago, compared to only 29 percent of men), less supportive of the war in Iraq (46 percent of women say it has not been worth the cost, compared to 37 percent of men), and more supportive of progressive concepts, such as generally not attacking pre-emptively (56 percent of women oppose pre-emption, compared to 44 percent of men). Additionally, women are generally more favorable toward progressive groups, such as human rights organizations, and progressive issues, such as working to protect the global environment. [Figure 16.]
- **Regional differences.** The differences between the country's cosmopolitan coastal areas and its rural heartland are pronounced in this survey. People on the coasts are less likely to feel the current government has improved the country's security since 2000, compared to those in the heartland region (64 percent compared to 76 percent), are less likely to feel the war in Iraq was worth the cost of lives and dollars (48 percent compared to 58 percent), and are more willing to focus on global problems (47 percent compared to 57 percent).
- **Education.** Education also exerts a strong influence – in particular, creating more of a willingness to act on international issues. For example, by an 11 point margin, 51-40 percent, civically engaged adults as a whole say that the U.S. should



focus more on problems at home and less on those abroad; in contrast, by a 5 point margin, 43-48 percent, college-educated opinion formers favor the alternative statement, which stresses the need for working with other countries on global problems, even as we address priorities at home.

Another variable that contributes to education about global issues is the degree to which Americans have traveled abroad. While it is correlated to education, this variable turns out to have an even more powerful impact on whether people support addressing global problems. For those who have not taken any trips abroad in the past 10 years – which accounts for 41 percent of adults – there is a 32 point preference for focusing on issues at home, 60-28 percent; but for those who have taken 7 or more trips during that period (13 percent of adults), there is a 28 point preference for addressing global issues, 33-61 percent. [Figure 17.]

***Substantial support for U.S. foreign policies built on hope, and not just fear.***

Finally, the research suggests that there is a large base for a foreign policy agenda that is founded not only on fear of terrorism and foreign dangers, but also an optimistic determination to create a more peaceful and prosperous world. As on so many foreign policy issues at this point, the public is closely divided on this question. A 48 percent plurality feels that, “More than at most times in our history, the U.S. now is threatened and must take steps to protect its own people and security”; while 45 percent choose the alternative view that, “More than at most times in our history, the U.S. now has opportunities to help build a more peaceful world and ensure freedom and decent lives for more people around the world.” [Figure 18.]

While it may be disappointing to many that the first statement attracts slightly more support, it is encouraging how closely divided civically engaged Americans are on this choice given the salience of terrorism and other direct threats to the public’s security. Moreover, many key parts of the public actually favor the latter statement stressing the opportunities for building peace, freedom, and better living conditions around the world. A majority of opinion formers favor this view (50-43 percent), along with majorities of younger people (51-45 percent of those under the age of 30), mothers (52-39 percent), Americans who have traveled abroad relatively often (53-40 percent among those who have taken at least 4 trips abroad over the past 10 years), and those living in big cities (56-38 percent in cities of over 1 million). It may well be that as the public’s focus on 9/11 and the Iraq war recedes, progressive groups and speakers will be able to build on this substantial foundation to build even broader support for a forward-looking U.S. foreign policy agenda.