International Political Environment:
The National Intelligence Council (NIC) is a center in the US Intelligence Community that focuses and mid- and long-term strategic thinking. Relative certainties and uncertainties about the next 20 years (from the NIC):

- **Globalization is largely irreversible, barring a significant pandemic or total war**
  - Greatest benefits will accrue to countries able to integrate and apply new technologies
  - China and India GDP will rise relative to US; China not projected to surpass US until after 2040
  - India might overtake China
    - Population is younger
    - Entrenched democratic institutions
    - Working capital markets and world-class high-tech firms
  - Uncertain to what extent globalization will pull in lagging economies
  - Gaps between haves and have-nots

- **World economy will be substantially larger**
  - Smaller economies reap significant benefits from modest gains
  - Consumption explosion

- **Increasing number of global firms will facilitate the spread of new technology**
  - China and India are positioned to become technology leaders
  - Small countries can leverage prolific, cheap technologies
  - Expected convergence of nano-, bio-, information and materials technology
  - Global firms may be outside the control of any one state

- **Rise of Asia and new mid-level economic powers**
  - Major new powers
    - China
    - India
  - Other emerging powers
    - Russia
    - Brazil
    - Indonesia
    - South Africa

- **Populations will increase**
  - In 2020, population of world (7.8 billion)
    - 56% Asian (19% Chinese, 17% Indians)
    - 16% African
    - 13% from Western Hemisphere (4% from US)
    - 7% from Eastern Europe and Former Soviet Union
    - 5% from Western Europe
    - 3% from Middle East
  - Aging populations (due to low birth rates) in established world powers (EU, Japan, Russia, China)
    - May hinder economic development
• Rising social safety net costs (EU welfare states are unsustainable)
• Gender gap will narrow but not close due to
  o Youth bulges (e.g., boys get first priority in schools)
  o Population control policies
  o HIV/AIDS
• Current energy supplies are sufficient to meet projected demand
• Growing power of non-state actors
  o International terrorism shows no signs of abating
  o New form of identity politics centered on religious convictions
  o Growing number of multi-ethnic countries
  o Proliferation of high-tech IT creates the ability for small groups to mobilize and exert political influence disproportionately to their numbers
• Political power of religion will be a potent force
  o Radical Islam
  o Religious activists
  o Projected religious affiliation in 2025
    ▪ Christian (2.5 billion)
    ▪ Muslims (1.8 billion)
    ▪ Hindus (1.1 billion)
    ▪ Nonreligious (.8 billion)
    ▪ Buddhists (.4 billion)
• Arc of instability from Middle East, Asia and Africa
• Great power total war unlikely
  o Internal conflicts will occur in areas of weak governments, lagging economies, religious extremism, and youth bulges
  o Regional conflicts may grow from internal conflicts that result in failed states
• Environmental and ethical issues will become more prominent
  o Climate change
  o Intellectual property rights
  o Privacy
  o Cloning and biotechnology
  o Human rights
• US will remain single most powerful actor economically, technologically and militarily
  o Vulnerable to fluctuations as globalization networks deepen
  o Unclear whether US will be able to maintain its science and technology advantage
    ▪ Number of US engineering graduates peaked in 1985 and is down 20%
    ▪ Percentage of US undergraduate students in engineering is second lowest of all developed countries (China graduates 3 times as many as US, but Duke University found that half or more were less than equivalent to a 4-year US degree program)
    ▪ Privately funded research and development (60% of US total) has been down the past three years and major multinational corporations are establishing research centers outside the US
  o While no one country will challenge militarily, the cost of military action may prove high as WMDs proliferate
  o Increasing risk of cyber war (focusing on data, not just on hardware and systems)
U.S. Political Environment:

National:

The Pew Research Center reports several interesting trends in political attitudes in the US:

- 69% of polled voters think government should care for those who can’t care for themselves, up from 57% in 1994
  - 69% feel the poor are too dependent on government assistance, down from 79% in 1997
  - 71% of whites agree with the statements, while 61% of blacks agree

- 54% feel government should help the needy even if it results in more government debt, up from 41% in 1994
  - only 34% of Republicans agree with this position
  - 68% of Democrats and an increasing number of independents agree

- 76% find traditional values about family and marriage are important, compared with 84% in 1994; younger cohorts are less socially conservative than other cohorts

- 65% of people with household income >$75,000 feel the rich-poor gap is widening, compared to 51% of the same group in 2003; perceptions by lower income groups also feel the gap is widening

- 45% indicate prayer is an important part of their daily life, down from 52% in 1994

- there are wide divisions between Republicans and Democrats in terms of value positions, averaging 14%

- 50% of people indicated they were or were leaning toward the Democratic party, up from 40% in 1999, while only 35% indicated they were or were leaning toward the Republican party, down from 48% in 1999

- in the last five years there has been a decrease in the willingness to become engaged globally, and a reduction from 62% to 45% in those who think military strength is the best way to insure peace
  - concentrated in Democrats
  - 77% felt more attention should be given to domestic rather than foreign problems

- there was a reported increase in the number of atheist, agnostic, or no religion people, across all age cohorts, 12%, up from 9% in 1997

- 70% of people favor affirmative action to aid disadvantaged groups, up from 58% in 1995, with the increase almost the same in all political party affiliations

- 74% indicated they are more worried that businesses, rather than government, are collecting too much information on their personal lives

- 57% indicate they are confident in the wisdom of the American people to make political decisions, down from 73% in 2002

- only 34% agree that elected officials care what they think, down from 44% in 2002
  - 62% agree that government is inefficient and wasteful, up from 53% in 2002 (the younger the cohort, the less cynical it is about this issue)
  - 90% of people feel it is their duty to vote, and 64% feel guilty when they do not have the opportunity to vote

- 48% of blacks felt that success in life is determined by forces outside their control, compared to 31% of whites who felt this is true
• 41% of blacks indicated they have been unable to afford necessary health care, versus 23% of whites
• 51% of blacks indicated that they or someone in their household was without a job in the past 12 months, versus 34% for whites
• since 2002, the support for more restrictive immigration has decreased from 80% to 75%
• 70% of Democrats and Independents (up from 62% in 1997) and 54% of Republicans (up from 49% in 1997) feel corporations make too much profit
  o 58% feel corporations do not strike a fair balance between profits and the public interest
  o support for business has waned since 2003, while support for labor unions has remained relatively constant
• 40% indicated that infringing on civil liberties to curb terrorism was acceptable, versus 55% who agreed with this approach in September, 2001
• 83% favor stricter laws and regulations on protecting the environment
• 69% feel there should be greater emphasis on fuel conservation rather than new supplies
• 34% felt that science is hurting rather than helping society, down from 42% in 2003

A different Pew study reported on knowledge of current affairs:
• the growth in coaxial and digital delivery of information has had little effect on the overall knowledge of current affairs by US citizens
• education level is the single best predictor of knowledge of current affairs – as the education level rises, so does the level of current affairs knowledge
• college graduates, men, those in the baby boom generation, whites, and higher income people tended to be in the “high knowledge” category (the upper third of the sample, which scored 65% or higher on the survey)
• there was a 6% decrease in performance by college graduates from 1989 to 2007
• 37% of the respondents use at least one internet news source regularly
  o 71% regularly use local TV news
    ▪ 43% Fox news
    ▪ 39% CNN
    ▪ 28% NPR
    ▪ 17% O’Reilly Factor
    ▪ 16% Daily Show, Colbert Report
    ▪ 8% Rush Limbaugh
  o 54% regularly read newspapers
  o 23% regularly read news magazines

State and local:

Stateline.org is a daily publication of PEW that is devoted to state issues. Some observations from its most recent (2008) State of the States Report:
• states, not the federal government, are in the vanguard of solving the health care crisis
• states are innovating to elevate learning standards
• states are more assertive in addressing the needs of returning warriors
• states are filling the federal void on immigration policy
• gambling is proliferating in most states (all states bordering Nebraska except Wyoming allow commercial casinos)
• states are taking sides on the stem-cell issue by encouraging or discouraging research centers that engage in such activities
• infrastructure is in serious disrepair
  o a third of major roadways are substandard
  o one in four bridges require significant repair or are inadequate
  o 3,346 dams are at risk of failure
  o aging sewage systems spill 1.26 trillion gallons of untreated sewage annually, resulting in a clean-up cost in excess of $50 billion annually

The State of Nebraska currently has a positive cash reserve, and proposals have been made to reduce taxes. Funding for infrastructure refurbishment is limited. The state historically has not provided significant support to private education. The 2008 elections will elect a new U.S. senator to succeed Sen. Chuck Hagel. The race for the 2d District of Congress was closer in 2006 than in recent past, and it is not clear at this time which Democrat will face Rep. Terry in the fall election. Jim Esch, a Creighton alum is considering another bid for the seat.

The City of Omaha faces significant financial issues in the near future. Liabilities for pension and health care, resolving east Omaha sanitary and storm sewer issues, and the resolution of the College World Series/Rosenblatt Stadium issue could add several billion dollars to budget requirements over the next five years. At the time of this writing, there is significant political turmoil on the stadium issue. Creighton has publicly distanced itself from the decision about a downtown stadium. The University Master Plan provides for an on-campus baseball and softball complex sufficient to meet the University’s sufficient to meet student-athlete needs.

Comments:

The educational systems in developing countries are not consistently on a par with US institutions of higher learning. VISA restrictions post-9/11 reduced the ability of some foreign students to travel to the US for their educations. Although technology infrastructure challenges might prevent robust growth of distance learning in many developing countries, such programs might be feasible in India, China, Brazil, and Russia. Expanded study abroad programs in these countries also might be coupled with temporary US faculty presences as an opportunity for local students to engage in US educational programs without the necessity to travel to the US.

Sources:
National Intelligence Council, “Mapping the Global Future"
Salzman, Next Now: Trends for the Future