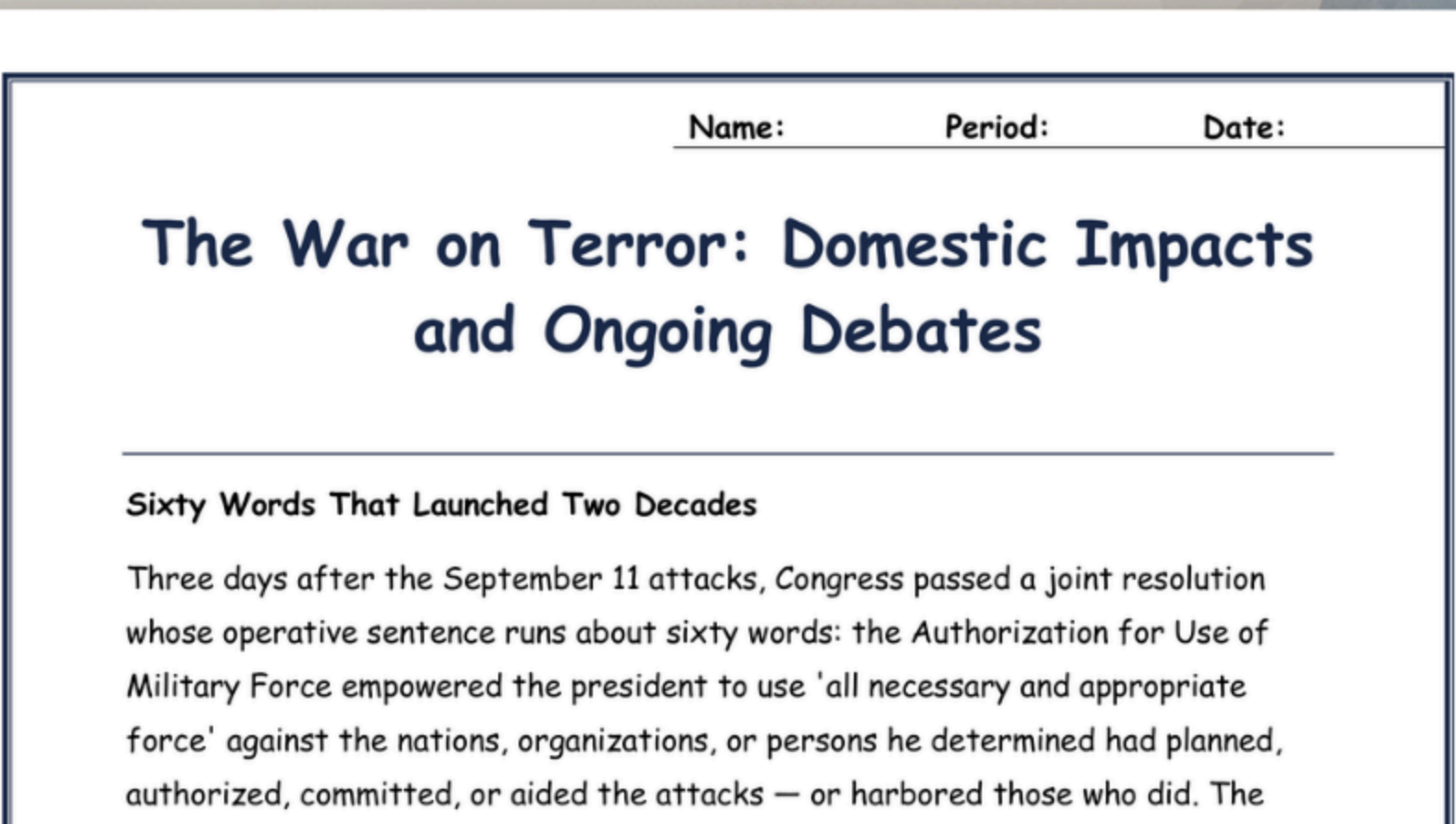
NO PREP

The War on Terror

Domestic Impacts and Ongoing Debates

Includes: Student reading, case study, differentiated questions, teacher key



Name: Period: Date:

The War on Terror: Domestic Impacts and Ongoing Debates

Sixty Words That Launched Two Decades

Three days after the September 11 attacks, Congress passed a joint resolution whose operative sentence runs about sixty words: the Authorization for Use of Military Force empowered the president to use 'all necessary and appropriate force' against the nations, organizations, or persons he determined had planned, authorized, committed, or aided the attacks — or harbored those who did. The

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disputes is their durability — repeal efforts have passed single chambers repeatedly across two decades without ever reaching a president's desk.

The Homeland Security State

At home, the War on Terror built institutions at a pace unseen since World War II. The Department of Homeland Security, created in 2002, merged twenty-two agencies into a workforce that grew past 240,000 — the largest government reorganization in half a century. Joint Terrorism Task Forces pairing federal agents with local police multiplied from thirty-five to more than a hundred. States built 'fusion centers' to pool threat information; cities installed camera networks with federal grants; and a public vocabulary of vigilance arrived — color-coded threat levels (retired in 2011 as more anxious than informative), airport rituals, and the transit-poster injunction that became a national reflex: 'If you see something, say something.' The apparatus produced genuine capability — plots were disrupted, information silos broken — alongside genuine pathologies: fusion centers criticized for monitoring peace activists, watchlists that ensnared innocents with no clear appeal, and a security industry with a fiscal interest in perpetual alarm. The deepest domestic change was atmospheric: a generation grew up regarding surveillance infrastructure not as an emergency measure but as the ordinary furniture of public life. The apparatus also redistributed power among governments in ways civics courses rarely cover. Federal homeland security grants — tens of billions across the era — turned local police departments into partial instruments of national security policy, funding armored vehicles, surveillance gear, and counterterrorism units in towns statistically unlikely ever to face terrorism; critics traced the militarization of American policing partly to this pipeline. States gained fusion centers but also unfunded mandates; cities gained cameras but also federal priorities. Federalism after 9/11 tilted toward the center on security questions — a structural change, invisible in any single budget line, that reshaped who decides what 'public safety' means in an ordinary American county.

The Surveillance Wars

No domestic front proved more contested than surveillance. The Patriot Act expanded investigative tools within weeks of the attacks; less visibly, the president secretly authorized the National Security Agency to intercept certain communications without warrants — a program exposed by the New York Times in 2005, igniting the first great legal battle of the era. The second arrived in 2013, when contractor Edward Snowden revealed that the NSA had been collecting essentially all Americans' phone metadata in bulk under a secret interpretation of Patriot Act Section 215. Civil liberties organizations litigated; a federal appeals court held the bulk program exceeded the statute; and Congress passed the USA Freedom Act in 2015, ending bulk collection while preserving targeted authorities. The cycle — secret expansion, exposure, backlash, partial reform — repeated often enough to become the era's signature rhythm. Its civic lesson cuts both ways: the checks eventually worked, but only after leaks and lawsuits forced sunlight; oversight designed to operate in secret consistently deferred to the powers it was overseeing. The debate continues today over Section 702 foreign-surveillance authority and each new technology of collection.

The Ledger: What It Cost

The War on Terror's costs resist tidy accounting, but the known entries are staggering. Brown University's Costs of War project tallies post-9/11 war spending — including future veteran care obligations — at roughly eight trillion dollars, nearly all borrowed. Over 7,000 American service members died in the post-9/11 wars, with tens of thousands wounded and far larger numbers carrying traumatic brain injury and PTSD; veteran care will span the century. Civil liberties casualties accumulated at home: prolonged detentions of non-citizens cleared of terrorism, no-fly lists without due process, surveillance of activists and faith communities, and the enduring legal anomaly of Guantanamo Bay, where detention without ordinary trial outlasted the wars that created it. Harder to price is opportunity cost — what eight trillion dollars might otherwise have built — and the civic cost of

a state whose emergency powers became permanent fixtures. Defenders answer the ledger with a counterfactual: no second 9/11-scale attack occurred on American soil, and disrupted plots argue the apparatus earned its keep. Both entries belong in an honest accounting. The human ledger extends beyond the battlefield casualties. Veterans of the post-9/11 wars returned to a country that funded their care unevenly: the signature wounds — traumatic brain injury from blast exposure, PTSD, toxic exposure from burn pits — took years of advocacy to win recognition, culminating in the 2022 PACT Act's expansion of burn-pit-related coverage, a fight that consciously echoed the Zadroga campaigns for 9/11 responders. Military families absorbed two decades of repeated deployments; suicide claimed more post-9/11 veterans than combat did. Any full accounting of the War on Terror's domestic impact must include this generational obligation — care measured, like the wars' finances, in commitments stretching to mid-century.

The Debates That Will Not Close

Two decades on, the War on Terror's domestic arguments remain live precisely because its legal architecture remains standing. The 2001 AUMF is still in force; presidents of both parties have used it, and Congress has repeatedly debated but never repealed or replaced it — leaving the blank-check question exactly where Barbara Lee left it. The effectiveness question resists closure by its nature: prevented attacks cannot be counted with confidence, so the same record supports 'the system works' and 'the threat was overstated.' Federal attention has partially pivoted to domestic violent extremism, importing the old dilemmas — surveillance, watchlists, civil liberties — into a context where the watched are citizens by definition. And each new technology, from facial recognition to AI analysis of communications, re-runs the founding argument with sharper tools. For students, the War on Terror is not a finished historical unit but an inherited operating system still running beneath American life — and the debates this reading surveys are the user's manual a citizen needs: who authorized the power,

who oversees it, what it costs, and what it would take, constitutionally and politically, to turn any of it off.

Key Information: The War on Terror at Home

Detail	Information
AUMF (Sept. 18, 2001)	~60-word force authorization; still in force
Lone dissent	Rep. Barbara Lee warned of a 'blank check'
DHS (2002)	22 agencies merged; workforce past 240,000
JTTFs	Grew from 35 to more than 100 task forces
NSA bulk collection	Exposed 2013; ended by USA Freedom Act 2015
War spending	~$8 trillion including future veteran care
U.S. military deaths	Over 7,000 in the post-9/11 wars
Color-coded alerts	Introduced 2002; retired 2011

Case Study: Sixty Words on the Whiteboard

Government teacher Dana Whitfield, 39, opened the unit by writing the AUMF's operative sentence on the whiteboard — all sixty words — and telling her seniors only: 'Congress passed this three days after 9/11. It is still the law.' She split the class: one side argued the authorization still covered current operations; the other, that it had expired in spirit decades ago. Marcus argued the text plainly covered anyone who 'aided' the attackers — 'and the groups fighting now descend from them.' Priya countered by listing what the words never mention: 'No countries. No years. No groups founded after 2001. If this authorizes everything forever, Congress declared its last war in three days and retired.' The room went quiet when Dana added Barbara Lee's 2001 floor speech and asked who had cast the braver vote — the 420 or the one. "I don't grade your position," she told them. "I grade whether you can locate the power: who granted it, who wields it, who could revoke it, and why they haven't." Three students, she later noted, wrote their senior theses on war powers.

1. What constitutional tension does the classroom debate surface about the AUMF's open-ended text?

_____

_____

2. Why does Dana grade students on 'locating the power' rather than on their position?

_____

_____

Multiple Choice

1. What did the 2001 AUMF authorize?
    a) Force against those who planned, aided, or harbored the attackers
    b) A formal declaration of war on Afghanistan and its neighbors
    c) Domestic surveillance of citizens
    d) The creation of the TSA

2. What ended the NSA's bulk collection of Americans' phone records?

a) A presidential pardon

b) The USA Freedom Act of 2015

c) The program still operates unchanged

d) A constitutional amendment

3. Why is the War on Terror's effectiveness so hard to measure?

a) No records were kept

b) All the data remains classified

c) Prevented attacks cannot be counted with confidence

d) Congress officially banned all studying of the question

Matching

Write the letter of the correct definition on the line next to each term.

Term	Definition
1. ___ AUMF	A) Barbara Lee's warning about limitless war authority
2. ___ Fusion center	B) Brown University accounting of post-9/11 war spending
3. ___ JTTF	C) State hub pooling threat information across agencies
4. ___ Costs of War project	D) 2001 authorization for force against those behind the attacks
5. ___ Blank check	E) Federal-local partnership investigating terrorism cases

Fill-in-the-Blank

1. The AUMF passed the House 420 to _____.

2. Post-9/11 war costs are estimated near eight _____ dollars.

3. The color-coded threat alert system was retired in _____.

Short Answer

Answer each question in 2-4 complete sentences.

1. Why does the AUMF's wording matter so much to everything that followed? Analyze its key phrases.

_____

_____

_____

2. Describe the 'secret expansion, exposure, backlash, reform' cycle using one surveillance example.

_____

_____

_____

3. Construct the strongest honest version of both sides of the effectiveness debate.

_____

_____

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