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The Obama Doctrine: Hindering American Foreign Policy

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Abstract: *The President has not yet defined the Obama Doctrine but its features are emerging through his statements and actions. These include a growing reliance on international organizations, a greater sense of humility about American values and foreign policy achievements, a reliance on foreign aid rather than military power, among other things. It is a value-neutral approach that rejects the concept of American exceptionalism. Essentially, the President hopes that if every nation can be brought to the table, they will eventually agree. In this analysis, the world is like a puzzle of equally valuable pieces that can be made to fit together. Unfortunately, other nations like Russia and China look at the world as if it were a game of chess and are moving swiftly to outmaneuver the United States. In the short term, American foreign policy is difficult to change dramatically because there are so many nonpolitical actors involved throughout the "permanent government." The Iraq and Afghanistan deployments have been harder to wind down than President Obama foresaw, and Guantanamo Bay remains open for business. Yet with two presidential terms, much damage could be done with serious consequences for America's ability to be a global leader.*

HELLE C. DALE: The question before us today is whether President Obama will follow in the footsteps of other American Presidents and have a doctrine attached to his name. If we think back to Ronald Reagan, it was "peace through strength;" for George W. Bush there is identification with a freedom agenda and, of course, protecting Americans in the war on terrorism.

Talking Points

- The emerging Obama Doctrine is focused on risk aversion, humility on the world stage, and international cooperation at all cost.
- President Obama considers the United States just one of many nations and an "equal partner," while others like Russia and China play a game of chess to outmaneuver the United States wherever possible.
- The President's commitment to international treaties reflects a belief that they should constrain the U.S. in some ways and that our legal system should adapt to international norms rather than conform to such internal restraints as our Constitution, our history, and our traditional understanding of freedom and liberty.
- If this doctrine continues to inform U.S. foreign policy, it will do real damage to America's security and ability to lead in the world.

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Roughly halfway through his presidential term, President Barack Obama has yet to define his doctrine. That leaves the field open for us to delve into the subject. Those who study American foreign policy, like our two distinguished scholars today, will find the outlines of a doctrine easier to identify as time goes on.

Some might object to placing labels on foreign policy. Does it matter what label we choose—realism, pragmatism, neoconservatism, Wilsonianism? Yet if you want to identify a set of principles and underlying assumptions about America's role in the world, definitions are a very worthy intellectual exercise. Americans looking at the President's leadership style today will have to ask themselves whether they feel confident about the way he is carving out the U.S. role in the world.

To get us started, I will pitch some questions to both our panelists to generate a discussion.

First, I would like to ask our panelists to briefly discuss how they view the Obama Doctrine. It has been described in different ways—as realist, or progressive, or by the President himself as simply pragmatic. You have each published recent papers on the Obama Doctrine.[1] Is it any or all of these, and how can we compare it to other presidential doctrines?

KIM R. HOLMES: When my colleague James Carafano and I first considered publishing our recent paper on the Obama Doctrine, we reviewed what Barack Obama said in a number of speeches—during the campaign and in the first year of his presidency—on foreign policy. The relevant remarks were few and far between in that first year; there was a great focus on domestic policy. Yet we started detecting, even then, common themes in his remarks.

It was only after the release of the National Security Strategy this year that we felt confident we could match his statements with what that document said about official national security strategy. It was only by comparing what he (and at times other U.S. officials) said that we had enough common points to describe his "doctrine."

Doctrines are evolving things. People will debate what they mean; they really imply what a President believes based upon what he says and does. We were very careful in our study to take what the President said seriously, rather than to say, as so often happens among foreign policy sophisticates, "Well, he doesn't really mean that, because you can't take what politicians say seriously." I believe we should take seriously not only what Presidents do, but what they say.

Doctrines are evolving things. People will debate what they mean; they really imply what a President believes based upon what he says and does.

It is true that Obama's foreign policies are not ideologically monolithic. He has continued some of George W. Bush's policies regarding Guantanamo Bay, counterterrorism, intelligence gathering, and even in some of the Afghanistan war strategy. These and other policies do not necessarily match up with the larger philosophical points he has made. Nevertheless, we have found common threads which, when weaved together, give us a discernable world view—and it is that view that I call a "doctrine."

Helle mentioned that, historically, we have come to identify presidencies with certain doctrines. George W. Bush had his doctrine, even though there was a difference of opinion about what it actually meant. (During the last campaign, there turned out to be three or four George Bush doctrines; people were trying to pin down what the man stood for.) We have, of course, the Reagan Doctrine supporting anti-Communist insurgencies; the Monroe Doctrine; and others. This is an intellectual exercise with a long history, and I'm sure we will have some differences of opinion about what we define; but I still think it's a worthy exercise because at least it tries to pin down what the President stands for.

1. Kim R. Holmes and James Jay Carafano, "Defining the Obama Doctrine, Its Pitfalls, and How to Avoid Them," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2457, September 1, 2010, at *http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2010/08/Defining-the-Obama-Doctrine-Its-Pitfalls-and-How-to-Avoid-Them*, and Henry R. Nau, "Obama's Foreign Policy," *Policy Review* (Hoover Institution), No. 160, April 1, 2010, at *http://www.hoover.org/publications/policy-review/article/5287*.

I see roughly four characteristics of the President's approach that we believe define the Obama Doctrine. The first is Obama's repeated emphasis that the United States is not, as historically understood, an exceptional nation, but rather an "equal partner" with other countries.

I realize the first objection to that point will be that all Presidents talk about the U.S. being a partner. When I worked as Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs, which included the U.N. system, we used the "partner" language all the time. But here I am not talking about day-to-day diplomatic partnerships and bilateral relationships or partnering with this or that institution; I'm talking about the position of the country in the world and how it relates to the traditional position of American leadership—not only through its alliances, but also its global role.

In many of the President's statements, he seems at the very least uncomfortable with the idea of American exceptionalism, this idea that America has a special role to play in the world and a special responsibility based upon its unique history. It is a unique kind of responsibility, not only in terms of our military power and our alliances, but also in terms of the value system that led many other American Presidents to identify America as global leader.

Obama is uncomfortable with that; sometimes he talks about American exceptionalism, but then he says it is no different from Greek exceptionalism or British exceptionalism. He seems uncomfortable even with the appearance that he's asserting this idea of exceptionalism, which he seems to equate with arrogance just as some of America's critics do.

But why should this make him so uncomfortable? He is, after all, the President of the United States, not a professor at Harvard. U.S. Presidents are supposed to be highly sensitive to American interests and history. Instead, Obama appears to have carried with him the value system of the "faculty lounge" in which American exceptionalism is equated with arrogance, imperialism, and other assorted evils.

The second point—and, as with our other points, I think the President sees himself over and against the legacy of George W. Bush and thus often asserts rhetoric that is intended to distinguish himself from Bush—is that Obama, in his statements and also in the National Security Strategy, emphasizes the importance of international treaties. This includes not only the New START treaty with Russia, but reviving some treaties that have been dormant in the U.S. Congress like the Law of the Sea Treaty, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and others.

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They are being explained not just as utilitarian, but as good for the U.S. and good as part of a larger vision that the U.S. needs to more fully engage the international legal community in the United Nations and in international conventions. The idea also appears to be that international treaties should constrain the U.S. in some ways and that this is a very good thing. It implies also that treaties will help adapt our legal system to international norms that exist outside the U.S. rather than conforming to inside restraints: our Constitution, our own history, and our traditional understanding of freedom and liberty.

In President Obama's speeches in Cairo, at the Americas Summit, and elsewhere early in his presidency, he projected the need for America to adopt a more humble attitude. By humble, he doesn't necessarily mean humility the way it was discussed, ironically, in the Bush Administration before 9/11. There was actually talk then of being more humble vis-à-vis Bill Clinton, but what they meant was that they would challenge some of the assumptions about the humanitarian interventions Clinton used in Bosnia and elsewhere that projected his liberal internationalist agenda. The Bush Administration was going to be more realist and therefore more prudential in a conservative sense.

Then 9/11 happened; Iraq happened; Iran happened; and that all changed. Then Bush went the other way and developed the Freedom Agenda, which many people saw as neoconservative. But I

think it was more a reaction to the 9/11 event and the fact that George W. Bush saw himself as a war President and was challenged to deal with that.

In that sense, what Barack Obama means about humility is the need to apologize for parts of American history. Obama is essentially saying that Bush and other past Presidents have not only *not* lived up to American ideals, but to international ideals as well. This was not a realist critique, but a moralist one arising from decades of critiques in the American and European left.

The offspring of "humility" is "restraint," and in Obama's foreign policy this translates not only into "engaging" rivals like China and Russia and even enemies like Iran, but to distancing the United States from potentially troublesome allies.

This has produced some ironic results. Many Europeans have, in fact, become disappointed that Obama has not fulfilled some of their hopes and expectations, not just on climate change, but moving closer to the European Union on other issues. Obama seems largely indifferent to closer ties with Europe, so even those who are perhaps more ideologically predisposed to agree with his worldview are disappointed. On the other hand, this approach has not resulted in much cooperation from Iran or North Korea. In fact, if anything, these countries have become even less cooperative than when Bush was President.

What Barack Obama means about humility is the need to apologize for parts of American history.

The practical but ironic effect of this worldview is that the U.S. is starting to pull back on supporting its allies, and even on interventions in the U.N., while focusing more of its diplomatic activity on the extremely difficult task of mollifying America's critics and rivals. In other words, the focus of U.S. diplomacy now is to find marginal gains from changing the often intractable behavior of rivals and enemies, even if the results are poor and even if it alienates friends and allies.

This approach is in some ways the inevitable consequence of a more humble, more restrained America. It is being motivated in many ways by the President's ambivalence about America's power and position in the world, perhaps even shame, if you will, about some of the things he perceives the United States has done. You can see it in his Afghan war strategy; he campaigned by saying the Afghan war was the "good war," but the first thing he does when he gets into power is try to find a way out of it, only to find out that his generals are looking at it quite differently.

The focus of U.S. diplomacy now is to find marginal gains from changing the often intractable behavior of rivals and enemies, even if the results are poor and even if it alienates friends and allies.

I am using the word ambivalence intentionally. I'm not saying he's opposed to American power; I am saying he's uncomfortable with it. After all, he uses fairly aggressive drone attacks in Pakistan. In some ways, he's authorized a far more ferocious tactic against some Taliban leaders in Pakistan and Afghanistan than George W. Bush ever did. Of course, he's killing rather than capturing and bringing them in for interrogation, which causes problems for those arguing for the rights of those in Guantanamo Bay; nevertheless, it is a fairly forward-leaning strategy.

Once again, it is ambivalence; Obama seems uncertain about where this country should be heading. I think he's uncomfortable with the traditional sense of American leadership. He seems to have internalized many of the criticisms of American power that originate in Europe and other places, and he seems to believe the best way to keep our enemies at bay is to give them less of a reason to oppose us. The way you deal with that is by accommodation: trying not to be terribly concerned about hard power, military deterrence, and the like and always trying to find a diplomatic or "soft power" way out of a problem.

Unfortunately, as we have seen with Iran in particular, a lot of countries looking at American power and leadership do not mirror how we or the European Union think the world should work. And very often they draw the opposite conclusion of what it is we would wish them to do.

HENRY R. NAU: I agree with many of the points Kim has made, but let me take a bit of a different stab at it. I will take Obama at his word that he is a pragmatist. I've heard the label used by many of his supporters, "pragmatic internationalist," and I would be more comfortable with that if I knew exactly what kind of internationalism one was talking about, because I've been puzzled by the fact that he doesn't seem to be a traditional liberal internationalist; that is, where you would put very high on your agenda the promotion of freedom and democracy and human rights around the world. It's very clear that he's not in that mainstream liberal internationalist tradition.

So if he's a pragmatic internationalist, he obviously sees the world in somewhat different terms than a liberal internationalist would. I think he does have a worldview, and therefore I think his pragmatism is used in the service of that worldview. You could think of that worldview as an ideology, a coherent sort of sense of how the world works. I'll make several points about how that world works as far as he's concerned.

The first very important point for him is that the world works like an interconnected set of material problems; that is, there are a series of things out there that we're confronted with. We don't choose them; we're confronted with them—like an economic crisis in the world economy, for example; like the spread of nuclear weapons and the existence of loose nuclear weapons; like an energy problem that is going to get worse and worse as countries develop and grow as China is doing; and like a climate change problem.

These are largely material problems; they result from conditions out there that we could resolve if we could just get together and fix them. They are not problems that derive in any way from some kind of moral trouble going on in the world. They're not problems that originate in some sort of confrontation of political ideological views in the world.

So I think the first point I would make is that the world of internationalism that he sees is much more of what we would call in the academic world "functional internationalism"; that is, it's internationalism focused on problems, specific big problems, not on moral challenges. Not on the struggle for freedom in the world today, or not on the struggle of dissidents for more open governments around the world, or not even the confrontation with authoritarian powers in the world. That's just not central to Obama's understanding of the world.

I don't mean to say that he doesn't have a moral sense. I'm just saying that it's very clear from his words and his deeds that he believes you need to define problems in a way in which you can bring everybody together to the table to solve, and so he wants to focus on problems that he says are "shared."

The struggle for freedom, the struggle of dissidents for more open governments, even the confrontation with authoritarian powers are not central to Obama's understanding of the world.

You'll remember a year ago *The Washington Post* had a front-page story about the importance of shared interests in Obama's view of the world. I think they were onto something. He said, for example, at the U.N. last year, "I hold deeply the belief that in the year 2009, more than any point in human history, the interests of people and nations are shared." He wants to define the world in a way in which we can look at common problems.

In Prague, just a couple months before the U.N. speech in 2009, he made it clear why he doesn't want to focus on moral differences, why he doesn't want to focus on political conflicts. He said, "When nations and people allow themselves to be defined by their differences, the gulf between them widens." So he doesn't want to pick up these issues of struggle for freedom, for human rights. He doesn't want to pick them up directly because he has the sense that that is going to simply divide people. He wants to bring them together, and he wants to focus on these common problems.

He repeats those problems over and over again, and they always come before any discussion of democracy or any discussion of economic development or any of the other aspects of American foreign policy. Central are the campaign to deal with nuclear weapons, loose materials as well as the proliferation of nuclear weapons, climate change, energy, and the like.

Now, when you try to fix problems rather than define them—they're defined for you already; you're simply trying to fix them, and you're trying to bring people together to do that—you approach the world the way Obama has approached it; that is, with all sorts of diplomatic efforts and diplomatic surges. He has flooded the international system in the first couple of years with initiatives in all directions. These problems are interconnected, so you can't solve them individually; you have to solve them all together. He's given us no clear idea of, among these problems, which is a priority and which can unlock progress in other areas; you simply deal with them all at the same time.

If you ask the question, what are Obama's priorities aside from this view of the world and all of these material problems that exist out there? I think you would have to just say, all of them. All of them are his priorities. You get the world together to fix these problems. That's why there's a tremendous emphasis in Obama's worldview on multilateralism, as Kim suggested. Everybody has to be at the table; everybody has to participate in solving these problems. He is very concerned about bringing adversaries to the table no less than allies. In fact, he's more focused perhaps on the adversaries because maybe they have more of a role in creating the problems; therefore, you've got to bring them to the table in order to solve the problems.

Obama sees the world very much like a jigsaw puzzle. All of these interrelated problems have to be fit together. You have to have everybody at the table to do that.

That's certainly true in the case of nuclear proliferation. He wants to bring the adversaries—Iran, North Korea—to the table to solve these problems. So you have to have everybody at the table, and you have to work on these problems and put them together almost like a jigsaw puzzle.

I think if there were a catchphrase I would use to define Obama's view of the world, he sees the world very much like a jigsaw puzzle. It's all of these interrelated problems that have to be fit together. You have to have everybody at the table to do that. There's an implicit assumption that you all know the picture that you're putting together, that everyone wants a world free of nuclear weapons and with all nuclear materials locked down, that everybody wants a world of green energy and costly efforts to deal with climate change.

I think many aspects of Obama's view of the world fit into the picture. He does not see the world as, for example, Ronald Reagan did, as a moral chessboard, as a game of chess in which you're out not simply to fix problems; you're out to shape problems and to ultimately win. You're engaged in a moral conflict—in Reagan's case, with Communism. In my view, we're not facing a threat today comparable to the Cold War and to the Soviet Union, but I do think we are facing moral conflicts. I do think we're facing moral issues, and I think ultimately they underlie many of the problems that Obama is focused on.

The nuclear weapons themselves are not a problem, you could argue; we've just allowed India to have nuclear weapons, so why couldn't we allow other countries to have nuclear weapons? It's the kind of countries who have the nuclear weapons. That's the problem. The problem is the kind of country that Iran is or that North Korea is, and that's a totally different perspective than the one that Obama has.

In other words, you could argue that the nuclear weapons are there as a consequence of a moral conflict going on in the world and a set of political confrontations going on in the world. What Iran doesn't like is the character of the picture on the cover of the jigsaw puzzle that Obama's trying to get them to the table to help him put together.

In contrast to other Presidents—I'm talking about two ways of thinking about the world, and I'm trying to understand the proportions between the two—I think in Obama's case there is much more of the jigsaw puzzle view of the world than there is of a moral chessboard view of the world.

KIM R. HOLMES: You are absolutely right, particularly on this whole question of values—democracy, freedom and human rights—though President Obama seemed to make a correction to that in his recent speech at the United Nations. We will have to see how far that goes in reality.

There is this functional aspect to his policies that you mention, but we also need to ask what underlying reality motivates this pragmatism. Early in his presidency, there was talk about a kind of liberal realism, if you will, in the sense that Obama, by pulling back from George W. Bush's freedom agenda, was addressing the world more as it really is and not trying to transform it. It sounded very pragmatic and realistic, because it wasn't as forward-leaning in its perceived idealism as we saw from George W. Bush.

The reason that problems like Iran and North Korea are getting worse is that there has not been a proper diagnosis of the problem.

I would argue that there is more to his motivation than just realism or pragmatism. I think Obama firmly believes, as you mentioned, in his worldview that most countries in the world actually share the same worldview and interests, as he says repeatedly, and therefore, it is this kind of functional approach. As you rightly point out, the problem is particularly those adversaries who do not share that worldview. Yet he wants to believe they do; therefore, he imposes this kind of diplomatic strategic approach to places like Iran and North Korea and almost seems befuddled when they don't respond to it, because it is not conforming with the way he thinks they should see their self-interest.

And so there's a mirror imaging going on, which is very common in many of the circles Obama was in before becoming President, about the way the world works, which frankly is not realistic. It may be pragmatic, but only in the sense that it is somewhat restrained compared to what happened before.

But if pragmatism is about actually solving problems, I do not see us making great progress either in North Korea or Iran, and in some ways some of these problems are actually getting worse. The reason they are getting worse is there has not been a proper diagnosis of the problem. The reason the Iranians want nuclear weapons is to deter us, to deter their neighbors, and to be a dominant power in the region, not because they feel offended or because we look down on them in some way. Obama seems to believe if we simply accommodate that idea, they will come around, but it is completely misreading why they want the nuclear weapons to begin with.

It also fundamentally goes back to the point I make about his ambivalence about American power. He made this statement once: "Whether we like it or not, we remain a dominant military superpower, and when conflicts break out, one way or another, we get pulled into them, and that ends up costing us significantly in terms of both blood and treasure." He obviously is thinking of Iraq. It reveals not only an ambivalence about American military power, but that one of the reasons he thinks these conflicts happen is because we have projected ourselves too much, in the past particularly, with military power, and therefore, if we restrain ourselves, other people will reciprocate.

As we have seen with countries that share our values, that we are allied with in Europe and many other places in the world, we don't have this problem. It is the ones who don't share our values, who don't buy into the functional approach you talked about, that we have problems with, and there seems to be a complete blind spot because that world does not conform to Obama's worldview. And he frankly does not know how to deal with it, particularly when it comes to the use of military power.

HELLE C. DALE: I think it might be worth remembering that French President Nicolas Sarkozy accused President Obama of living in a virtual world and that all the American soft power in the world had done absolutely nothing about Iran's nuclear program.

HENRY R. NAU: To be fair to Obama, his speech in Oslo was one of the best he ever gave, and he gave it to an audience that was not likely to appreciate what he had to say, because what he said in that speech was that evil does exist in the world. What he said in that speech is that sometimes you do have to fight. That was an audience that was not receptive to that message—believe me, he got applause only once when he mentioned Guantanamo.

But that's the problem with Obama. He did go on in that speech to say that war was both sometimes necessary and always a tragedy, so we must find a way to avoid it. He challenged the Europeans and

said that means we've got to strengthen our collective capacity to deal with the bad guys. That means we've got to work on sanctions, and if we do that, he says, we won't have to go to war.

That's Obama's worldview. I think he knows in reality that you don't get to choose all of your wars; he certainly acknowledged that when he said that Afghanistan was a necessary war. But his heart's not in it. It's going to take a lot for him to acknowledge that a situation is warlike, because he's going to look for every possible way around it. There's going to be a cost to that. I think the cost is already becoming evident.

While Obama has been holding the door open for China, Russia, and Iran, those countries have been pursuing a totally different agenda.

I'll take three countries: Russia, China, and Iran. While Obama has been holding the door open for all of these countries, in fact working assiduously with those three countries on his agenda—climate change with China, economic crisis with China, nuclear weapons with Russia, non-proliferation with Iran—those countries have been pursuing a totally different agenda.

Look what's happened in China in the past two years now. It predates Obama, so I don't think what happens in China is necessarily a response to Obama. It's not. It's a response to a lot of things that are going on in China and going on in Asia.

But China has become much more belligerent in its foreign policy. After a decade or less of reaching out to Asia, the sort of soft power approach that China allegedly was engaged in, in the last couple years, it's gotten increasingly assertive, and it is not very apologetic about it; it's not very ambivalent about it. It has made it very clear that these islands in both the East China and the South China Sea are Chinese territory and that they are core elements of Chinese interests.

I continue to wonder what China's doing in North Korea. For years we've hoped that China would put the pressure on North Korea that would be needed to bring North Korea to the table, but we always knew that the one thing China didn't want was a collapse of the North Korean regime, because that would bring chaos to its borders, and it certainly didn't want an integration of the Korean Peninsula on the terms laid out by South Korea—that is, on democratic terms.

Frankly, I think China has an interest in the status quo in North Korea, and if relations were to heat up with the U.S., it could potentially use North Korea actively in an effort to try to chip away at American and Western dominance around the world—principally through, in fact, the provision of nuclear capability and nuclear technology and other sorts of assistance, as we have already seen in the case of North Korean assistance to some countries in the Middle East like Syria.

Russia has been delighted, I think, with Obama's reset policy. It has given Russia a world stage again. It's back in the business of being a great power, and what has it been doing while all that's been happening sort of in the klieg lights? It's been reinforcing its troops in Abkhazia, in South Ossetia. It's building bases. It's settling in for the long term in those provinces in Georgia, its occupation not recognized by anybody else other than Venezuela, Nicaragua, and maybe Nauru. It's just been quietly doing that.

What's it been doing in Eastern Europe? It's been quietly moving things in Ukraine in directions more favorable to Russia; they have a new government, which isn't maybe as favorable as Moscow would like, but nevertheless more favorable than the previous one. And once again—it's interesting—they're starting to talk about their gas issue. This is the way the Russians ratchet up the pressure whenever they want to move forward another step in Ukraine or in another part of Eastern Europe. They'll use the leverage they have to cut off gas supplies in order to shift the politics inch by inch in a direction favorable to them.

Moscow wants a larger sphere of influence. They talk about it openly. They talk about a "sphere of privileged interest." This is the Moscow we're dealing with. I'm not against cooperating with them on the things that we can cooperate on, but to close your eyes to these other developments and not to say anything about them, and more-

over not to say very much about the repression that is going on in Russia under the Putin–Medvedev regime, is really irresponsible, especially for the leader of the free world.

We're on schedule to withdraw from Iraq. We've withdrawn from combat. We hope to be out of there by the end of next year. Not a word about Iran's escalating intervention in Iraq.

I wonder to myself: How can we be so indifferent? We're on schedule to withdraw from Iraq. We've withdrawn from combat. We hope to be out of there by the end of next year. Not a word about Iran's escalating intervention in Iraq. I mean, Iran is a neighbor. They have easy access; they have all kinds of friends in Iraq.

Wouldn't it make sense, while you're trying to get Iran to stop its nuclear program and while you're trying to contain Iran in that sense, wouldn't it make sense to say to Iran, look, we're not sure when we're going to get out of Iraq. It's not going to be an open field for you guys to go in and mess things up or destabilize things, if that's what you have in mind. We're there for the long term, we're there to protect the security of that country. But we send the other message: that we're trying to stop you from getting nuclear weapons; we're going to contain you if you do get nuclear weapons, but we're heading out of Iraq as fast as we can.

What kind of message does that send to Iran? I don't have any doubts about the present administration in Iran—I don't mean there aren't some elements inside Iran who are now obviously in the opposition and who are under severe restraint—and what they're up to. I doubt seriously if sanctions are going to bring them around on stopping their nuclear program. That's Obama's view of the way the world works, and they're going to continue to make trouble. The more we make clear that we're not up to that trouble, then I think the more the tide turns against us.

I'll close by saying I don't think there's a wave of Chinese aggression or Russian or Iranian aggression; that's not what I'm saying. I think there's a pattern, and I think it's incremental, and I think it's happening as a result of our not focusing on these problems, because in this case, Obama has his focus on other things, and he has a way of thinking about the world, as I suggested, that pays less attention to these questions of moral struggle and political conflict.

HELLE C. DALE: The problem for Obama, of course, is whatever you want to say to the American people, such as we want to get out of Iraq, is a message that is boomeranged around the world. The Iranians are going to listen to that message just as well as the domestic audience here in the U.S. So he's not able to have one message for his voters here at home and one message for the Iranians. That is an unfortunate conundrum for the President.

Dr. Holmes, are there any specifics of the Obama Doctrine or manifestations you wanted to touch on, like some of the treaty negotiations?

KIM R. HOLMES: With respect to Russia and China, whether it is in the name of "reset" or in the name of "engagement," if the U.S. perspective internalizes the claims they have against us and the rest of the world—and, of course, the Russians and the Chinese have all kinds of claims: China on Taiwan and the Russians in the area around their so-called sphere of influence—it will have consequences. It is not just rhetoric. At that point, it is not a far step to adopting their ideas or essentially adopting a double standard.

The Russians are talking about selling missiles to the Iranians for some time and selling some missiles and arms to Syria. Yet this Administration finds it very difficult to give military assistance to Georgia.

For example, the Russians are talking about selling missiles to the Iranians. They've gone back and forth on it, but they have been talking about it for some time and selling some missiles and arms to Syria. Yet this Administration finds it very difficult to give military assistance to Georgia. And the reason? It does not want to provoke Russia. Yet Russia does not worry too much about provoking us with these particular actions or other actions. This is a double standard, and the reason it is there is

because the Administration has internalized *their* narrative and their justification of what is proper and not.

The same thing with China. We have had negotiations for a long time about selling aircraft to Taiwan, and there has been some progress in the previous and even in the existing Administration. But there is in this Administration a reluctance to move too fast, primarily because of China's objections. There is even a reluctance, for example, to join the Trilateral Commission with India and Australia vis-à-vis China, because doing so might appear too provocative to China, since China is left out of this grouping. Yet China does not think twice about joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization or any other regional grouping that leaves the United States out, because they believe this is their area and, therefore, they have a right to claim that the U.S. has no right to be there, implying that America is not a Pacific power.

This may be very subtle stuff, but my point is that this approach has real consequences. The same thing with respect to the missile defense deal in Europe that President Bush made and Obama reversed. At least the implicit idea behind that decision was that if the Russians had a right to claim that somehow this was aimed at them, even though we said it was not and we still say it was not, at least we understood why they might think that it was. Therefore, in order to accommodate that concern, we'll refashion the missile defense program in Europe to make it less provocative to the Russians, and maybe that will make the Russians more accommodating.

The Russians came back and basically said they still were unhappy and they will continue to be unhappy with the decision, because it is not about whether or not that system can really deter a Russian missile; it is about the fact that the U.S. is putting strategic systems inside what they perceive to be their sphere of influence. That is the issue. That is what we are doing with Poland and the Czech Republic. That issue is non-negotiable to us, and yet we don't want to talk about it that way because it would appear to be provocative.

So these double standards get adopted and have consequences, not only in terms of the actual balance of power, but also in the messages it sends to Russia and China.

Henry's exactly right; China has been increasingly provocative in the last year or so. They move forward, they pull back, then move forward depending on what the issue is. It is a chess game to them. They do not look at the world the way President Obama does. That is, I think, the fundamental difference between a view of the world that is actually based upon seeing the world as it really is rather than as you would like it to be.

HELLE C. DALE: I think there's almost something immature in this view, because it seems to have internalized all the arguments of the opposition so that that kind of pressure comes from inside; that restraint comes from inside.

KIM R. HOLMES: He seems to believe that an assertive American posture is implicitly arrogant and there is something wrong with that. I am not talking about rhetoric. Anybody could come up with something George W. Bush said and say, well, wasn't that arrogant? It may or may not have been.

President Obama seems to believe that the presence of the American military is somehow provocative to the world. The implication is that, in some fashion, the problem is us.

I'm not talking about words. I'm talking about what you actually do. President Obama seems to go beyond the rhetoric and actually believes that the presence of the American military, its prowess and position and even preeminence, is somehow provocative to the world, and therefore, by restraining it, we will get a more peaceful world. The implication is that, in some fashion, the problem is us.

HENRY R. NAU: I think that's really central to Obama's core view. He said it in Prague; it's a very interesting comment: "When nations and people allow themselves to be defined by their differences, the gulf between them widens"—which means that he doesn't want to confront these differences. He'll find ways around, find ways to avoid them, or find ways to take up problems where you have some shared interests.

It's interesting because in one sense, you can be so humble you can be ultimately incredibly arrogant. When you're so humble that you think that other people act only in reaction to you—that is, if you're going to do something to stand up for your rights, the other side is going to be provoked by it, and otherwise they're going to cooperate; they're only going to be provoked if you provoke them. In other words, their behavior is entirely determined by what you do.

KIM R. HOLMES: This is incredible arrogance, ultimately. Russia and China have their own core interests. They have their own core political philosophies. They have their own core understandings of the world. We're not even talking about our immediate problem of militant Islam and the terrorists' understanding of the world. These actors are acting on the strength of their views and their ideas and their capabilities; they are not acting simply in reaction to us. It may not even matter that much what we do in terms of their core interests.

What puzzles me is that we have been incredibly open and generous to China over the last 20 years, maybe more. We have welcomed China into a globalized world and encouraged them to grow at phenomenal rates, picking up 300 to 400 million of their people and putting them into the middle class. They could not have done any of that without the world system that we superintend and without access to our markets, because we are still the largest recipient of Chinese goods.

It is in our common interest. I am not saying that we paid a price for that. We both grew together, and now we have this deep interdependence because we take their goods and they take our debt. But in those circumstances, wouldn't you think that China would be talking about common global interests and working to try to help strengthen those common global structures instead of talking about a "first ring" and a "second ring"?

HELLE C. DALE: We have some questions from the audience, and some of them take us in interesting directions. One here that I thought would be interesting to explore when I was thinking about what we should talk about today: "Can the speakers discuss Obama's approach to the world? Does 'more humble, less arrogant' fit better with the role that the American people want for America in the world?"

There was a poll recently published by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs which indicated that Americans view their country's role in the world as diminished, as becoming more diminished down the road; they're still fairly internationalist, but do not really desire the U.S. to take a strong leadership role. I was reflecting on this and thinking, well, maybe there is a fatigue among Americans, leadership fatigue or war fatigue or however you want to call it.

Dr. Holmes, is Obama in tune with the American people, or would a different leader strike a different chord with them?

KIM R. HOLMES: Yes and no; these are two different things. One, I think the American public, as you see in the opinion polls, do have war fatigue, not only with Iraq, but also Afghanistan. But I would not necessarily draw the conclusion from that or extrapolate from it that therefore they are buying into all the assumptions and ideas we are talking about in the President's and his Administration's mindset.

Most Americans still believe the United States of America is an exceptional nation. Most of them do not like to see their country lose wars. Most of them do not like to see their country go into perpetual decline, economically or on the world stage. They still are proud of their country. They still believe in the sort of traditional idea that this is an exceptional nation; we have a role to play, we have to figure out how to do it, and we have all these problems at home. On the other hand, they are not ready to give up on America.

To that extent, some of the ambivalence that underlies the point we are discussing here about America's position in the world and its leadership role is not, I think, shared by the majority of the American people, although they may have fatigue with a specific issue like the war in Afghanistan.

I think the real issue is—and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen said this

at Brookings, I believe—that the greatest threat to the future of America and to national security is our growing debt. By that he meant not just the capacity to fund the armed forces, but also how it will sap the will of the American people to do anything abroad because we will be focused internally on our own problems, preoccupied with Medicare, Social Security, and all the problems there. Many things the government does here for many Americans will become such a primary focus that we could not be able to play that great a role in the world. And that worries him because what has happened in the 20th century (and I hope will happen in the 21st century) is because of an engagement of American power, values, and diplomacy in the world, rather than a more isolationist approach.

Yet if we do not solve the debt problem, American decline will come from within, and therefore, American decline abroad will reflect the internal decline if we do not fix the debt problem. We can debate this until we are blue in the face. I can have all the ideas about American leadership I want. But we will not have the capacity—and most importantly, the confidence and the will—to act as the world's leader, and if we do not have confidence in our economic future, then inevitably the idea of America having an exceptional responsibility in defending freedom and its allies in the world will in fact retreat.

The real issue is that the greatest threat to the future of America and to national security is our growing debt.

I often say to my friends in Europe, be very careful what you ask for. They often think that during the years of George W. Bush, we were too aggressive, too forward-leaning, and all of that. Now they are seeing a more restrained American posture, and they're saying, "Wait a minute; I didn't really mean that you had to withdraw from the world; you just had to be more like us." Then I say, but that's precisely the point: If we are more like you, we will be withdrawn from the world, because that is why the European Union is not a superpower. America is different, and if you do not recognize the difference, then I don't think you have recognized the real role that America has played over the last century in global politics.

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HENRY R. NAU: I think in the end you find out what the American people want through elections, and that's what we do pretty regularly. I think it's a great thing. I think Obama has a great opportunity to sell his first two years of stewardship in the fall campaign, another opportunity in two years to sell his stewardship and his style of leadership and his way of thinking about the world, and let's find out what the American people believe and what they prefer.

I think he is selling a much more restrained type of American leadership in the world, one in which we are much less self-confident. We're always asking questions about whether we should be doing that: Is that too arrogant, or is that too much, or are we provoking somebody here? That's the style of leadership that he has been practicing and I think that he is selling to the American people.

Obama is a remarkable man, and in my view, he is a tribute to the country I love. I think he knows, too, that he probably could not be elected President in any other white country in the world. Maybe I'm wrong there, but I think he has that sense. He does say that repeatedly overseas; he points out the fact that he's where he is because of who America is. And so I want to give him all the credit in the world. Let him make his case; let us make our case. I'm looking for Ronald Reagan for the 2012 campaign because I've been through this before.

I went through the 1970s, and I suffered through this period where we were told that we couldn't lead anymore; we couldn't grow anymore; we were at the end of the line; it was a new world that had been taken over by the OPEC countries, and energy and other resource shortages; stagflation meant you had to have a certain level of infla-

tion to lubricate all the conflicts in society because society was becoming increasingly ungovernable. I was a young man in my 30s, and I suffered through that period, and then, all of a sudden, this voice came out of the wilderness. I didn't know who Ronald Reagan was, but then in the late '70s I began to hear it, and I thought to myself, my God, he's talking about the things that I actually believe in, and I think he hit a stream across America, three-quarters of the American people who resonated with it, so he won that debate.

There's another debate going on, and we'll see who wins, and it's up to the American people. I hope somebody does lay out a candidate, a style of leadership that contrasts with Obama—not necessarily widely contrasts, but clearly contrasts. One that says look, of course we can cooperate with countries that we have problems with. If it's in our interest to cooperate with Russia, assuming the verification procedures are in fact good in the New START agreement, okay, that's a positive for that kind of thing. But at the same time, you can hold Russia accountable for what it's doing in Georgia; you can hold Russia accountable for any attempts it makes to increase its influence in Ukraine. You can hold Russia accountable for its internal affairs. You can speak about it, and you can talk about it.

Ronald Reagan kept talking about human rights and problems with repression in Russia right up until the end of the Cold War. In May of 1988, he made a speech in Moscow—you should read that speech, because he told the Russian people that this was not the way to go in terms of treating your own people.

So we can do both. We can be a beacon for—and by the way, we're the only ones who can be a beacon for—this kind of voice for freedom and for liberty in the world and for open markets; we're it. If we don't do it, I don't see the Europeans stepping forward to do it. I don't see Japan stepping forward to do it. And I think Kim is right: They damn us for what we do and for what we don't do. That just goes with the turf, and I would say have a good sense of your own leadership, and the Europeans will follow. I think there's a lot of opportunity there.

Democracy is still strong around the world. It's stronger than it's ever been in my lifetime, and we have lots of efforts underway to try to strengthen civil society and non-governmental groups. Obama has finally addressed that in his development policy speech.

Democracy is still strong around the world, and we have lots of efforts underway to try to strengthen civil society and non-governmental groups.

We've got NED, the National Endowment for Democracy, a creation in fact of Ronald Reagan, and we've got all the activities that go with NED. We should be going to the Europeans and saying, gosh, do you guys have an activity like this? If you don't, you should. We don't need to multilateralize or institutionalize them, but we can collaborate, and we can talk and energize and encourage each other to seed our non-governmental groups all around the world, helping people to strengthen the small zones of freedom in those countries.

Meanwhile, we in government—and this is the message that I think the American President has to provide—are going to be talking to these governments about this. We don't necessarily have to talk about it publicly. Reagan was very good about understanding that you don't put your partner in a box from which they can't escape, but he was certainly not shy about making it clear in bilateral contacts and private contacts his concern for the people who were being put in prisons. In the case of a country like Iran, I'm sure President Reagan would have been saying some things vocally and repeatedly about the treatment of the Iranian people who happen to have a different point of view from this particular government.

I think you can be both understanding and forthright—America is. Look at the world America has created over the last 75 years. Not just from our standpoint, but from the standpoint of hundreds of millions of other people in numerous other countries, it's been a great world. It's been a world in which people have progressed. So America does

have a capacity to empathize. We can be both leaders and good partners.

HELLE C. DALE: I think that was a very stirring speech. For a change of pace here, a question I suspect maybe from a reporter in the audience, if either of you would like to comment on the Obama Administration's attitude toward a long-standing ally of the U.S., Japan. We had talked a bit about different styles of communication with our allies in this new age. Has Japan suffered as much in terms of downgrading relations in some ways as Europeans have or as Israel has?

HENRY R. NAU: I do help Congress run a program that brings together members of Congress and members of the Japanese Diet and members of the South Korean National Assembly twice a year to talk about issues. These are the three countries, of course, that are absolutely key to anything that happens in Asia politically, economically, or militarily. The conversations have been very robust in the last few years because of the whole question of how do we restructure our forces in Asia.

Japan is openly discussing more of these issues. Japan has crossed a number of Rubicons in the last 10 years, putting naval forces into the Indian Ocean—they're not there anymore, but they were there for awhile, supplying fuel to the ISAF forces in Afghanistan. Japan has ships now in the Indian Ocean, south of the Arabian Peninsula, against piracy. Japan has had much more open debates about their military role, I think very healthy debates. I have no preference as to where the Japanese come out on this, but they're becoming more open and more self-confident in discussing it.

I've been a little concerned that Japan has been off our radar screen for the last couple years, just as other allies have been. China has been much more important, Russia has been much more important, and now Obama is going to Japan this fall. They need our attention, and they need a strengthening of this relationship.

I wonder why we can't utilize the Futenma[2] issue, which is a really difficult one, because it's got all the elements to it: What's the best posture for American forces in terms of dealing with threats in the region? Those threats are not getting any less, but potentially worse with what's going on in North Korea and the Korean Peninsula. They go all the way down to the most local political level you can imagine, and that is the mayor and governor races in Okinawa where the people are genuinely fed up with the way that they've been treated, largely by their own government. They host most of the U.S. forces, and they've been promised for years that those forces would eventually be spread out more evenly throughout Japan, but that hasn't happened.

So it's a difficult issue but one that we ought to be trying to transform into an opportunity, and that opportunity, in my judgment, would be if we're going to restructure forces, let's at the same time take another strong big step forward in terms of strengthening and maybe trilateralizing these alliances. We don't have to do that in any kind of a formal way, but we should be doing it in an informal way; that is, mutual exercises, planning—especially as China begins to think in terms of exerting its interest in the first island chain and then in the second island chain. I think there's an opportunity in both Japan and South Korea to work on that, but we've been focused on just sticking with that Futenma agreement of 2006.

I understand the reasons for wanting to hold onto that agreement. I wouldn't give it up for anything, except something bigger, something larger like what I'm talking about, and that is a forward development of the alliance relationships in that region in the interest of quietly making it clear to the Chinese that if they go that route, they're going to confront a strong allied presence.

KIM R. HOLMES: I would agree that it is more a matter of emphasis than anything dramatically different. There has been substantial continuity in U.S. policy toward Japan. There's also been significant political turmoil in Japan over the past year that has sort of caught the Obama Administration off guard. It did not know how to deal with the former government when it was reopening questions about our military bases and the like, and a

2. Futenma Marine Corps Air Station, located on the island of Okinawa.

few months went by where both sides were very uncertain. I think we have passed that point.

But I think the larger point, which is the right one, is really not so much about continuing the strong alliance with Japan, which we should do for a whole variety of reasons, but also about understanding how all of our alliances and our relationships in Asia work vis-à-vis China. We have a profound ambivalence about that as well because our relationship with China is ambivalent. We like to trade with them, and yet we are also concerned about what they are doing in certain areas. That is translated into policies throughout the entire region.

The larger point is really not so much about continuing the strong alliance with Japan, but about understanding how all of our alliances and our relationships in Asia work vis-à-vis China.

So how do you work India, how do you work Australia into this picture when any time you do anything diplomatically or strategically with these countries, the first thing China says is, "You're just trying to contain me." That kind of defensiveness is actually quite revealing. The Chinese immediately leap to the conclusion that we are trying to contain them. Why? Because they think they have a certain right to do things. Their definition of containment is any objection to what they are doing. And yet do we once again internalize that narrative to the point where we and Japan and other countries are so accommodating that we don't take even modest steps to deter China from taking certain actions?

That's really the name of the game in East Asia. We will get to the point where we have enough diplomatic agreements under our belt, to where China basically has laid down the claim—whether it is the South China Sea islands or something else—and that becomes pretty much accepted in our diplomacy and cannot be reversed without appearing to be provocative.

That is probably more of what is at stake with the Obama Administration's policy toward China than anything else, because on the face of it, there has been continuity. A lot of the people here, including those who work in our Asian Studies Center, look around the world and find there is less to disagree upon regarding Asia policy than anywhere else, and that is partly because the region is relatively stable and there has been continuity.

On the other hand, how do we back up these subtle signals we are sending out to Beijing now with respect to Taiwan, with respect to its island disputes with Japan? Do we back them up or not? What is China doing with respect to providing nuclear reactors to Pakistan, and what do we say about that? All of this is part of a chess game, and if we don't play it well, we could end up sending out the wrong signals for the future.

HELLE C. DALE: I'd like to combine two questions from the audience. The question of forward deployment of American forces: If Obama is ambivalent about the use of American power, why do we still remain forward deployed all over the world? Why do we have bases in so many different locations? Could this possibly be because, even with a President who has a dramatically different view of the world from his predecessors, there is an underlying continuity in U.S. foreign policy that sort of defies easy changing?

KIM R. HOLMES: I think that's right. You can even see it in the debate over the new Afghan strategy, where the President came in with a certain view, and he was running right up against the military's view that what we are supposed to do is prevail in conflicts, and back and forth it went. So even though he brought that view to the table, at the end of the day what came out was not really what he was comfortable with.

That is why I call it ambivalence; I'm not calling it anything more than that. This is true in intelligence; it is true across the board. There is a permanent government, and there's a lot more continuity in the end than probably we would even like to admit.

But that's not really what we are discussing here. We were discussing the predisposition and the outlook of the President and then asking ourselves, what effect does that have on all these questions? Whoever wrote that question and the assumptions is correct. I think there is a lot of continuity; but on

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the other hand, if Obama is reelected in 2012 and we have eight years of attempts to have his worldview prevail, it will have a lasting effect in some fashion even on the permanent government.

HENRY R. NAU: Obviously, the U.S. position in the world is a huge vessel which takes a long time to turn or steer in one direction or another. Just because of our sheer size and our presence around the world, things don't happen overnight. But I think these incremental changes in emphasis are important because, over time, they could move us in a very different direction.

I like to think that where we are today—and we can debate this—is a consequence of the very strong moves we made 30 years ago to strengthen American defenses around the world and shore up our bases and alliances around the world. It's a consequence of the enormous economic success which we've enjoyed over the last 30 years and which we've been able to share. We've created a world in which economic prosperity has been shared by countries like China and now India, Brazil, and others.

And so we have moved the big ship in what I think is a very, in general terms, healthy direction. Sure, you trim the sails as the world changes, and we trimmed some after the end of the Cold War. There's no question about that; it was justified. We've had to reconfigure that vessel to deal with 9/11. But if we have leadership for eight years or for 12 years in the direction that I think Obama would like to take us and we've been talking about all morning, I think it will move the ship, and we will be in a less favorable place 10 years, 20 years, 30 years from now as a consequence of that.

Some people will say that's inevitable, and it is true that we have superintended a world for 75 years in which others have increasingly gained in power relatively to us. We've continued, by the way, absolutely to gain. We haven't suffered at all, but we've clearly created a world in which others—think of Europe, think of Japan, and now think of China—can become more powerful, and we're willing to take that risk. So yes, over time, power is going to become more evenly distributed, but it means that American leadership is going to be even more important in terms of keeping that vessel pointed in the right direction of freedom and open markets.

Obama has been practically silent on trade for two years. I understand we're in an economic crisis, but this is the heart of the world economy, and if you don't say things about it, if you don't provide a structure where you can once again get back on that track of opening markets—he did in the recent development speech talk about open trade, open societies, so he may be starting to hit that point on the nose, but it's awfully late, and I don't know that his heart's in it, and I don't know that his party's heart is in it. We'll have to wait and see.

But that's just an indication of how you can modify at the margins the clear directions in which we want that ship to move. And the ship will move. It will take time; it's not going to turn overnight.

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