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Powers and Principles:
International Leadership in a Shrinking World

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A Stake in the System: Redefining American Leadership

Suzanne Nossel and David Shorr

With a reaction by Nikolas Gvosdev

About the Contributors

Suzanne Nossel is a scholar affiliated with the Center for American Progress. From 1999 to 2001 she served in the US Mission to the United Nations under Ambassador Richard Holbrooke and led negotiations to settle the United States' arrears to the world body. After her government service, Nossel was a vice president at the media companies Bertelsmann Media Worldwide and Dow Jones and is currently a senior executive at a large international organization.

David Shorr is a program officer at the Stanley Foundation, currently focused on the US role in the world. A recent project resulted in a coedited volume of bipartisan essays, *Bridging the Foreign Policy Divide* (Routledge). Shorr spent many years in Washington, DC, with foreign policy advocacy groups, including Human Rights First, Refugees International, Search for Common Ground, British American Security Information Council, and Arms Control Association.

Nikolas Gvosdev was editor of *The National Interest* and a senior fellow in strategic studies at The Nixon Center prior to joining the faculty of the Naval War College. He is the author of six books and coauthor of *The Receding Shadow of the Prophet: The Rise and Fall of Radical Political Islam* (Greenwood Publishing Group).

About the Project

The aim of the Stanley Foundation's project on **Powers and Principles: International Leadership in a Shrinking World** is to identify plausible actions and trends for the next ten years by which the international community could become more unified. The foundation asked contributing authors to describe the paths by which nine powerful nations, a regional union of 27 states, and a multinational corporation could all emerge as constructive stakeholders in a strengthened rules-based international order. For each case, the writers discuss how their given country might deal with the internal and external challenges posed by international norms for the global economy, domestic governance and society, and global and regional security.

Each essay in the series represents an assessment of what is politically possible (and impossible), supported by a description of the associated pressures and incentives. Unlike other future-oriented projects, there were no calculations of probability; we were interested in a particular global future—an international community with broad respect and support for norms—and how it might take shape. Authors were expected to address the particular challenges, pressures both for change and continuity, as well as natural leadership roles pertinent to their actor's geostrategic position, economy, society, history, and political system and culture.

The project did not apply a checklist or rating system to the question of stakeholdership. A responsible stakeholder can be an upholder, critic, and shaper of the rules-based order all at the same time. But while stakeholdership is not a matter of accepting the entire set of norms, if a powerful nation opts out of too many rules, it will undermine rather than uphold the order. To provide a perspective from the inside and counterweight to each essay, a commentator from the given country (or other actor) has been enlisted to provide critical reactions to the coauthors' piece.

America's Burden of Proof

Restoring the US role as a bulwark of the rules-based international order is essential for four reasons. First, it is necessary to reestablish US global credibility and influence in the near term. Second, this role is vital to the United States' ability to advance its policy and security interests within that order over the medium and long terms. Third, US reengagement is critical to the continued strength and evolution of the international order itself. Fourth, the vitality and relevance of the international order is—in turn—the most durable structural basis on which the United States can promote its interests and values globally.

Until recent years, the US status as a responsible stakeholder in the global system went mostly without question. The United States played an essential role in designing and erecting the compacts and institutions on which the international order is based and subsequently became a leading player in nearly every one. The United Nations Charter, the major human rights treaties, the international financial institutions, and the global trading system would not exist in their current forms had it not been for US engagement and guidance.

This is not to say Washington always played by the rules. The tradition of American exceptionalism—the notion that the US global position is unique and merits special prerogatives—remained strong throughout the latter half of the 20th century, frustrating allies and critics alike. Consequently, Washington drew international criticism for failing to sign key international treaties, fulfill payment obligations to multilateral institutions, or adhere consistently to the principles that it espoused for others.

The policies of the George W. Bush administration nonetheless represented a drastic turn in US position in relation to the international order. During the first half of 2001 alone, the Bush administration adopted a new posture as the president defiantly “unsigned” the Rome Statute creating the International Criminal Court, refused to sign the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, and opposed the UN agreement to curb small arms. The administration stood in fleeting solidarity with others after the September 11 attacks to strike Al Qaeda's sanctuary in Afghanistan and unite the United Nations in a series of far-reaching global measures to counter terrorism. The lead-up to the Iraq war marked another turn in the dial to a stepped-up unilateralism. The American drumbeat for war was strong enough to drown out both Iraq's cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)—half-hearted though it was—as well as the paucity of international diplomatic support for an attack. When support in the United Nations for the invasion lagged, the United States attacked anyway. The administration's articulation of the new doctrine of preventive war meant that the Iraq invasion was not seen as an isolated act but rather as an imperious attempt to reshape international law.

When the search for Iraqi nuclear weapons came up dry and the war dragged on, opinion in the Middle East—and globally—hardened further. Revelations of human rights abuses against terrorist suspects in custody in Iraq and in US-controlled facilities reinforced perceptions that Washington had exempted itself from the rules. The protracted extrajudicial detentions at Guantanamo Bay, the revelation of secret CIA black sites, and reports of suspects being turned over to foreign governments for torture further undermined US credibility.

The net result is that US popularity, credibility, and influence have declined sharply. Beyond that, the very premise of US leadership has come into question. A July 2007 Pew Global Attitudes survey concluded that “global distrust of American leadership is reflected in increasing disapproval of the cornerstones of US foreign policy.” In 32 out of 37 countries surveyed by Pew

in 2002 and/or 2003 and then again in 2007, the proportion of people expressing approval for American ideas of democracy declined, often precipitously. Another compilation of 2006-2007 surveys of international public sentiment by WorldPublicOpinion.org and The Chicago Council on Global Affairs found that “publics around the world reject the idea that the United States should play the role of preeminent world leader. Most publics say the United States plays the role of world policeman more than it should, fails to take their country’s interests into account and cannot be trusted to act responsibly.”¹

Even without this credibility crisis, the rise of new powers means that no matter what it does, the United States cannot simply assume its former mantle of relatively unchallenged authority. The unipolar moment has passed. The task for the next president will be to carve for the United States a place in the emerging world order that leaves behind the baggage of the last eight years and allows Washington to regain a strong hand in shaping the order in the decades to come.

In doing so, the United States will bear the burden of proof, needing to show through its actions that it is prepared to behave as a responsible stakeholder in the global system. This will require a stance toward norms and institutions that is guided not only by self-interest, but by a commitment to the global order itself. Without that, the United States will continue to be weighed down by the millstone of international mistrust.

Americans perceive, even if they do not fully appreciate, the challenge that awaits. In the fall of 2007, three out of four Americans believed that the United States was less respected by other countries than it used to be and that this was “a major problem.”² This concern is reflected, for example, in the following passage from Republican presidential nominee Senator John McCain’s March 2008 address to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council:

...the United States cannot lead by virtue of its power alone. We must be strong politically, economically, and militarily. But we must also lead by attracting others to our cause, by demonstrating once again the virtues of freedom and democracy, by defending the rules of international civilized society and by creating the new international institutions necessary to advance the peace and freedoms we cherish.

Today, the electorate expects leaders to craft policies that are not only tough but also smart about consequences and effectiveness. A bipartisan spectrum of foreign policy specialists, for instance, now supports recalibrating counterterrorism efforts to make them more cooperative, with a new cost-benefit calculus to keep from unnecessarily arousing resentment.³

That said, signs of shifting attitudes do not bespeak a thorough political transformation. The new internationalism will be tempered by traditional US concerns and political realities. The United States will not go as far as some allies would like in embracing the international order—membership in the International Criminal Court and multifold increases in the share of US Gross Domestic Product (GDP) allocated to governmental foreign aid are unlikely to happen, at least right away.

¹ Pew Global Attitudes Project, “Global Unease With Major Powers,” June 2007; Chicago Council on Global Affairs and WorldPublicOpinion.org, “World Publics Reject US Role as the World Leader,” April 2007.

² Public Opinion Strategies and Hart Research, “The New American Consensus on International Cooperation,” slide 21.

³ “Revitalizing International Cooperation: A Bipartisan Agenda,” The Stanley Foundation, November 2007.

Because so many elements of the international order bear the United States' clear and longstanding stamp, the US disavowal of norms and institutions carries special weight. The US refusal to participate in the International Criminal Court or the Kyoto Treaty is perceived not as the neutral distancing of a Switzerland or Norway but rather as the rebuff of a presumptive insider.

As the United States repairs the damage, it will not have free rein to be a skeptical observer or a leery critic. Because of US economic and political influence, it must reposition itself near the center of global conflict resolution and institution-building initiatives to be seen as anything but a deliberate spoiler. In effect, then, when it comes to the international system, the United States must be for it or against it. Put that way, of course, the choice is obvious: being part of the system allows Washington to shape the rules, to utilize international mechanisms and organs to advance policy goals, and to legitimize American actions in a way that makes them easier and less costly to carry out. For all these reasons, the reestablishment of the United States' position as a leading pillar of the rules-based international order is critical to the attainment of long-term US policy and security objectives.

The reemergence of the United States as a custodian and shaper of the international system is also critical for the system itself. It is not that US participation is a formal prerequisite for the emergence of effective international institutions and norms. The International Criminal Court and the international bans on landmines, small arms, and now cluster munitions illustrate that effective multilateral initiatives no longer depend singly on Washington. Even so, on the most pressing global issues (climate change, nonproliferation, the use of force, global trade protocols), multilateral approaches without US involvement are bound to fail. It is also fair to say that given US economic and military strength, its relationship to particular norms and institutions—whether positive or negative—can influence the weight and strength of those standards and organs globally. US nonparticipation offers an easy excuse to other would-be recalcitrants.

Just as the US absence weakens international institutions, its presence strengthens them. US-led, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-sanctioned intervention to end the Bosnian war, to provide expedited relief and aid in response to the Asian tsunami, and to put in place the protocols that underlie the functioning of the global internet are all examples of crucial multilateral initiatives that would not have happened without US leadership. US ingenuity and political, technological, and economic dynamism are national assets that, if properly harnessed, can contribute to the evolution of an international system that is more responsive and effective than it would be otherwise.

The United States' status as a stakeholder will be judged across an array of dimensions including international politics and diplomacy, peace and security, and the global economy. In each arena, US behavior will be judged in the near term on the basis of whether it signals a clear break from recent unilateralist policies and indicates a new willingness to bolster global norms. Over the longer term, the United States will need to be seen not just to resume its seat at the table but to take responsibility for fundamental global challenges, to work to reinforce international rules and institutions for a fast-changing world, and to exert its leadership in a way that induces others to contribute to order building.

Diplomacy and the Maintenance of the International Order

In the diplomatic arena, the US near-term challenge is to undo the damage of recent years and reestablish American credibility as a global actor. Until trust is restored, diplomatic overtures risk being met with ongoing suspicion of American hypocrisy and self-serving motives. Once initial

steps have been taken to restore US credibility, the long-term challenge of demonstrating responsible stakeholder status is threefold: 1) demonstrating clear leadership on issues that the United States is uniquely positioned to help resolve; 2) being seen to uphold the evolving international order through efforts to shape and strengthen international norms and institutions that benefit both the United States, rising powers, other major powers, and the developing world alike; and 3) exerting its leadership in a manner that accommodates, rather than resists, the growing role of other global powers and of international institutions.

The initial steps to restore the United States international credibility are by now fairly obvious.⁴ At the top of the agenda is to restore the US record on human rights and specifically the treatment of detainees. Key measures include passing legislation forbidding torture in interrogations, eliminating secret detentions and renditions, and closing Guantanamo Bay with a commitment to the trial or release of those imprisoned there. Without these threshold measures, US credibility in the arenas of human rights and the rule of law will remain tattered. Beyond undoing the most egregious abuses of the Bush years, the next administration will need to identify some affirmative steps that signal a new willingness to uphold international norms and institutions. There is no single formula for this, but a set of visible gestures is needed. Two possibilities are running for a seat on the UN Human Rights Council and taking steps toward greater cooperation with, and ultimate accession to, the International Criminal Court. Both steps would signal a sharp break from the recent policies and mark a turn toward participation in the rules-based order. By demonstrating willingness to take part in forums that were designed and founded by others, the United States would send an important signal that its commitment to the international order is not limited to made-in-America concepts and structures. They would also entail confronting skeptical and entrenched domestic political constituencies.

The Human Rights Council is an obvious starting point. The council, established in 2006, is a successor to the disgraced UN Human Rights Commission, which had been notorious for its anti-Israel fixation and a fox-guarding-the-henhouse membership that included many of the world's most egregious violators of rights. Thus far, the council has not proven much better. It lacks definitive criteria for membership, its substantive agenda has continued the traditional anti-Israel bias, and its response to the worst human rights crises arising during its short life-time has been close to nil.

Even so, the council has shown flashes of potential. Human rights groups have waged successful campaigns to prevent serious abusers like Belarus and Sri Lanka from being elected as members. The council has initiated a sweeping universal review process whereby every single UN member state will periodically have its human rights practices scrutinized, thereby ensuring that even powerful governments do not get a free pass. Joining the council would not require the United States to refrain from criticizing of body, but simply to devote a few years of honest effort to see whether it can be reshaped into a credible force. Merely moving from a posture of outright rejection to one of skeptical but constructive engagement will go a long way toward resetting perceptions of US behavior.

Middle East Peace

The United States is widely seen as a pivotal player on a number of issues on the global agenda, which will serve as tests of its commitment to the health of the international order. Fairly or not, any lack of progress in these areas is laid at Washington's door. The Middle East peace process and the stabilization of weak and failing states are two of the most prominent issues. This is not to say the international community expects, or even wants, the United States to act alone in these

⁴ Suzanne Nossel, "Going Legit," *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*, Issue 3, 2007.

areas. On the contrary, constructive US leadership will empower directly-affected parties and engage a broad range of international actors.

Because of its staunch support of Israel, closeness to some Arab leaders, and historic mediating role, the United States is viewed as a linchpin of any durable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although the causes of the current impasse are manifold, the Bush administration's lack of attention to peace efforts prior to 2007 has made it easy to blame the United States for abdicating leadership in an arena where no other nation-state or institution can fill the gap. Compounding the case are arguments, valid or not, that without a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, various ancillary disputes in the region—tensions involving Syria, Lebanon, Iran, and Iraq—will continue to fester. Progress toward peace will not magically resolve these other conflicts, but it would undermine an oft-cited excuse.

To the extent that the Israeli-Palestinian dispute serves as a drain on international politics more broadly—by virtue of being a source of long-term instability in a strategically and economically pivotal region—a strenuous effort by the United States to resolve the longstanding conflict is a prerequisite for an American claim to upstanding citizenship. Meeting this standard will take early and sustained high-level diplomatic engagement, including by the president. It will also require US willingness to take on the difficult job of convincing Israel, as it has in the past, to take the risky steps it needs to for the sake of peace.

At numerous levels, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict raises core issues for the rules-based order. The occupation, the settlements, and the status of terrorist groups that enjoy apparent political support pose a set of interlocked challenges. The longer the current stalemate drags on, the more likely the United States will be blamed for failing to break the impasse and allowing conditions in the Gaza Strip to continue to deteriorate. By showing some incremental pragmatism toward the challenge posed by Hamas' leadership, the United States can avoid being perceived as the main obstacle.

Over the long term, assuming that an intensified US diplomatic effort helps achieve peace, it will be up to the United States to act as guardian of the agreement—ensuring that the needed political, security, and economic support is provided. Since one key incentive is increased economic opportunity for the Palestinians and the wider region, the United States will need to ensure that these benefits are realized.

Terrorism and Weak and Failing States

A key measure of US success in reasserting itself as an effective force in the international system will hinge upon its success in making the fight against terrorism a truly multilateral campaign. Insofar as it remains a centerpiece of US national security policy, the fight against terror should be transformed into a campaign that strengthens, rather than detracts from, the vitality of the international system. This is consistent with US interest in ensuring that counterterrorism efforts remain a broadly shared international priority in the years and decades to come. During the next few years, absent dramatic intervening events, combating global terrorism will become a permanent, yet less prominent, feature of the global security landscape. The long-term effectiveness of a steady-state US-led effort to deter and interdict terrorist action will depend upon broad and consistent global cooperation. As other economic, political, and national security imperatives gain in relative priority, the United States will want the ability to sustain wide support for counterterror measures without having to exert heavy bilateral leverage on a state-by-state basis in order to elicit it.

To date, however, the United States has not succeeded in securing the adoption of an overarching international treaty on terrorism and has, for the most part, downplayed multilateral

counterterrorism frameworks in favor of bilateral arrangements struck on Washington's terms. While effective in disrupting plotted attacks and impeding the ability of terrorist networks to communicate and plan, ad hoc bilateral approaches will not be effective over the long term in fully eliminating terrorist sanctuaries or building the capacity of states worldwide to combat terrorism within their own territories. Such approaches have already backfired in places like Pakistan where the United States was regarded as having strong-armed its ally while failing to build a US-Pakistani relationship that went beyond terrorism.

To avoid further backlash, counterterrorism efforts should be based on inclusive international participation in initiatives with intensive engagement by the United States along with recognized global legitimacy. US willingness to enmesh the fight against terrorism in broad-based multilateral institutions, including the United Nations and regional and specialized bodies, is essential to the long-term sustainability of the fight and, by extension, to the level of international support it receives. Indeed, efforts are underway to intensify the UN's counterterrorism activities, drawing on its roles in norm-setting, technical support for the capacity of member state governments, and serving as the main forum for global dialogue.⁵

The related problem of weak and failing states is another challenge on the global agenda where US leadership is seen as lacking, and where stronger performance will be central to the US claim to stakeholderdom. The debacle in Iraq has exposed just how ill-prepared the United States is to help stabilize and rebuild a conflict-torn society. Weak and failed states are widely recognized as among the principal security challenges of the present era—owing to the grave humanitarian and human rights crises they can precipitate, their potential to spawn regional conflicts, and their susceptibility to violence and terrorism by predatory nonstate actors. These anarchic stresses are highly corrosive to the global system, and any effort to strengthen the international order must deal with them.

The world community will inevitably expect the world's strongest conventional military to play a role, regardless of whether or not the United States bears direct responsibility for a situation, as in Iraq and Afghanistan. When a major country teeters on the brink, eyes turn to Washington for expertise, strategic military capabilities, and equipment. Indeed, until a much stronger, more coherent multilateral capacity to bolster weak states is built, any indecisiveness on the part of the United States will be viewed as a dereliction of leadership. So while a US contribution of ground troops may not always be appropriate, the United States will be a likely backstop to any kind of multilateral effort.

Military stability operations are only a part of the post-conflict recovery and reconstruction process. Nation-rebuilding is just one of the international challenges for which the United States needs urgently to reform and revitalize its civilian agencies. Several dozen recent studies have been done or are underway looking at specific measures to strengthen this infrastructure by bolstering the Foreign Service and making aid efforts more coherent. Here again, the United States must show its willingness to strengthen not only the capacity of its own government to stabilize weak states but also the complementary international mechanisms. Identifying and pressing for strong, dynamic, and experienced leadership in key roles at the United Nations and its specialized agencies will be one key step. While it is crucial that the United States be able to work with the most influential global civil servants—the UN Secretary-General and his key

⁵ Eric Rosand, Alistair Millar, and Jason Ipe, "The UN Security Council's Counterterrorism Program: What Lies Ahead," International Peace Academy, October 2007; "Implementation of the UN Global Counterterrorism Strategy: 42nd Conference on the United Nations of the Next Decade," The Stanley Foundation, June 2007.

lieutenants, for example—the United States must not undermine the efficacy of these posts in the name of avoiding any challenge to US points of view. The United States is, for instance, a member of the newly formed UN Peacebuilding Commission, a legacy of former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s 2005 UN reform campaign. Building that foundering body’s ability to coordinate aid to post-conflict missions and mobilize necessary resources could help prevent duplicated efforts, harness international contributions more effectively, and ensure that global partners match the United States’ own offerings.

International Law and Norms

The US commitment to be a global stakeholder will also be judged by its respect for international institutions and treaties. While the United States was the key engineer of much of the world’s current security and diplomatic architecture, it has long had an uneasy relationship to international organizations and norms—reserving the right to stand aloof from organs and agreements at will. Domestic politics and Congress have played a major role in dictating the US posture toward its international obligations. The United States has often had to ask the forbearance of other member states in tolerating, for example, refusal by Congress to fully and consistently fund the payment of US dues to the United Nations and other international organizations. The same understanding is tacitly extended in relation to the US unwillingness to fully assume certain treaty obligations; for example, its refusal to accede to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women or the UN treaty banning the use of child soldiers—agreements ratified by nearly all of the nations of the world.

The days when US leaders could fend off diplomatic pressure simply by blaming Congress are gone. With the rise of new powers, many democracies themselves, US leaders should anticipate rising expectations that the United States will overcome domestic isolationist pressures rather than dodging international obligations that are a tough sell in Middle America. As a bipolar then unipolar world now becomes multipolar or even nonpolar, the international community’s patience with the idiosyncrasies of its largest members will diminish. The international system would buckle under the weight of numerous capitals, each seeking to make its own rules or demanding exceptions when it suits them. The concern is not merely theoretical; after Congress passed laws barring full payment of UN dues and requesting a lower UN rate of assessment, the Japanese parliament followed suit.

That said, the domestic misgivings that stand in the way of wider US participation in global institutions cannot be wished away. Over the coming years, US leaders and diplomats will need to mount an intensive long-term effort to build support within the electorate and Congress for compliance with international norms. This will require a series of related steps: measures to bridge the divide between Congress and the world community through exchanges and dialogue; aggressive use of polling data to highlight and build upon the American people’s generally positive attitudes toward international cooperation and compromise; and—at least in the beginning—political leadership to take stands likely to draw heat from vocal minorities.

Institutions in an Age of Rising Powers

The US stakeholder status will also hinge on its leadership in transforming international institutions to accommodate the rise of new powers. If the United States is seen as clinging to outmoded structures or forums, it will be accused of resisting the inevitable evolution of the international system. It will need to actively make room for new seats at the table or else face intense pressure from others trying to muscle their way in. To date, the United States has gingerly sidestepped such debates. On UN Security Council (UNSC) reform, it has neither facilitated nor

blocked progress, leaving it up to those with the greatest interest in council enlargement to fight their own case. The United States will not be able to remain aloof forever, though.

If the riddle of UNSC enlargement proves difficult to solve in the next few years, the United States should pursue other ways to satisfy new powers' ambitions for greater participation in global decision making. Advancing proposals to revamp and expand the Group of Eight to include a broader group of countries like China, India, and Brazil would be one way to demonstrate the US commitment to ensuring that the international order remains up-to-date and relevant. Given the time-capsule quality of its membership, it is hard to imagine that the UNSC reform can be put off indefinitely. When the time finally comes to break the long-standing impasse, the United States could be in a position to help. The United States is the only current permanent member confronting neither pressures to step down nor direct rivals among the aspirants, which could give it a patina of neutrality and an ability to offer constructive proposals. The United States should remain on the lookout, amid shifting power dynamics and changes of the guard in key capitals, for a formula that stands a chance of winning the requisite support. The United States' relatively disinterested position may also mean that if UNSC reform continues to stall, that blame is increasingly laid in Washington, deservedly or not.

Meanwhile, the discussion in US policy circles of forging a new concert or league of the world's democracies as a key decision-making body is a wasteful distraction at best and probably somewhat damaging to the US image. To the extent that the United States is seen as "forum shopping" for a set of countries it hopes would be more conducive to American wishes, this sends exactly the wrong message. Increased consultation and collaboration among democracies at the United Nations and other global forums is a worthwhile pursuit. But the idea that the United States can remake the global security architecture by anointing a hand-picked group of countries into decision-making roles is far-fetched and, if pursued, risks exacerbating the tensions wrought by eight years of US policies that were judged as high-handed and self-interested. From a more practical vantage point, it is hard to imagine this proposal gaining support from those nations whose stamp of approval would be needed to give it any credibility—i.e. India, South Africa, and Brazil. Even if they did agree to participate, there is little to suggest that such countries would succeed in forging the consensus necessary for collective action.

Playing a constructive role as a stakeholder in leading multilateral institutions goes beyond paying attention to issues of membership and composition. On the question of structural and management reforms to multilateral institutions, the United States must hone a new approach that avoids denigrating or punishing the institutions themselves. The substance of US criticisms and reservations toward international institutions is not without foundation, but repositioning the United States as a leader and mainstay of the international order will require new approaches to advancing the calls for accountability. Bland calls for the United States simply to "play by the rules" offer scant guidance for the challenge of advancing US interests constructively without undercutting the institutions and norms in question. An important litmus test is whether the US approach to advancing its views and positions is one that could be followed by a wider group of countries without a broadly corrosive effect on the institution itself.⁶ In the case of withholding dues, it is clearly not the case; US financial withholdings have placed a heavy strain on the UN financial system, and wider holdbacks would be paralyzing. By focusing on intensive diplomatic efforts to drive reform—building coalitions, engaging in extensive consultations, and pressing recalcitrants—the United States can drive institutional reform while still being seen as a responsible stakeholder.

⁶ Don Kraus, "The UN: Pay as You Like It?" *The Globalist*, December 8, 2005.

Over the long term, stakeholderdom must entail openness and leadership in developing institutional and structural responses to global problems. Without such leadership, the United States will increasingly be viewed as an outlier and outsider—a force for international institutions to reckon with, rather than a pillar within them. With the notable exception of NATO, the Bush administration has tended to emphasize ad hoc coalitions and formulas—for example, its coalition for intervention in Iraq and its proposed nuclear deal with India—over reliance on standing institutions with rules, norms, and members that cannot be changed or ignored at will.

The evolution of the international system to cope with new problems will have to depend upon the ability to develop new organs and structures that respond to new security and policy challenges. US leadership in designing and building such structures will be key. Areas requiring attention include efforts to forge a bargain on the transparency of sovereign wealth funds and leadership in helping to evolve the world trade and nonproliferation regimes to deal more effectively with the pressures bearing down on these norm sets. In participating in such efforts, the United States will have to fashion its role not just as that of a protector of American interests but also as a steward of the international order as a whole. This will require the United States to work as hard to forge compromise as to push narrower interests.

Democracy and Human Rights

The international order can only be as strong and effective as its constituent member states are politically stable and vital. One of the major questions facing the next president will be how to approach the global spread of democracy and human rights.

During the latter years of the 20th century, the United States became the self-styled global standard for democracy and claimed to be the key patron and partner to countries in eastern Europe and elsewhere that had undergone democratic transitions. Although US support for democratization was always uneven and opportunistic, the perception that the United States was a friend to reformers and democratic dissidents reinforced its own legitimacy as a beneficent power. The promotion of democracy also helped to ensure that full membership in good standing in the international order was not merely about nations' control of territory, but also about the empowerment of peoples and the legitimacy of governments.

Tragically, the Iraq War gave US democracy promotion efforts a bad name both at home and internationally. By invoking democratization and the remaking of the Middle East as a post facto rationale for waging the Iraq War, the Bush administration opened itself up to a torrent of criticism. The United States was pilloried both for trying to impose an American-style democracy in Iraq and for failing so utterly to achieve anything close to that.

To be seen as a responsible stakeholder, the United States must prove that it remains committed to extending the benefits of democracy and human rights globally but that it will avoid doing so through unilateralist or militaristic ways. By helping strengthen multilateral instruments to promote democracy, expanding hands-on programs that build skills and infrastructure to create favorable conditions, and providing long-term support for new democracies beyond election assistance, the United States can show its commitment to the patient cultivation of democracy, with local roots, not just to the sentimental ideal.

Security in the Global Order

The earliest and most prominent signal of the new administration's international posture will be its handling of the war in Iraq. To prove its bona fides as a responsible stakeholder, the United States must take a series of steps no matter what the pace of its drawdown. The first is to open up

sustained and substantive dialogue with Iraq's neighbors as well as with a broader group of leading global powers that share a long-term interest in the region's stability. Such discussions must be open, unfettered, and undertaken on the basis that other countries' views will be taken seriously in the formation of US policy.

Second, as it withdraws its troops, the United States must do all in its power to avoid leaving chaos in its wake. Given limited US leverage over Iraq's internal conflicts with more than 120,000 troops on the ground, the United States will have even less sway over how things unfold after the withdrawal. Iraq's neighbors, however, do have leverage that can be multiplied if their governments can cooperate.⁷ Such a strategy of working "from the outside in" would call on Iran, Syria, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and others to discourage the Iraqi factions from escalating their conflict, refrain from feeding the fire with arms, and keep control of borders. A carefully planned and executed exit will include detailed consultations with the Iraqi government, collaboration with the United Nations, engagement of the Arab League (and of its individual members), measures to fortify and expand the work of local and international nongovernmental organizations that can play a stabilizing role, and firm commitments to continued aid and technical assistance—all with a view toward keeping Iraq from descending into a spoiling ground.

From the perspective of the broader challenges to the international community, an end to US military involvement in Iraq may be greeted with relief internationally; among other things, the United States would finally be able to pay attention to problems that had been pushed to the margins by the all-consuming Iraq situation.

Shedding Obsolete Nuclear Policies and Weapons

Stakeholders in the international system have no obligation more urgent than to protect the earth from nuclear conflagration. The international norm prohibiting nations from acquiring nuclear arsenals is under severe stress, and the United States will be measured by its role in keeping it from total collapse. Beyond immediate challenges posed by newer or potential nuclear powers, some of the solid citizens of nuclear nonproliferation are beginning to doubt the wisdom of their own good behavior. As new nations obtain nuclear weapons, others will reexamine their own strategic calculations—is it wise to remain nonnuclear in a world with more nuclear powers? It is easy to imagine regional nuclear arms races in the Middle East and Northeast Asia. Meanwhile, the insistence of long-time nuclear powers upon retaining their massive arsenals only compounds the problem. The more jealously this group guards its own swollen arsenals, the more they undercut the idea that these most destructive of weapons have no valid military role.

Restoring the norm of nonproliferation is still possible, but complacency and the passage of time combine to make it increasingly difficult. A fresh and bold US approach to nuclear policy and disarmament could help stem the proliferation tide, and the United States has every interest in doing so. Each of the de facto and potential nuclear powers—North Korea, Iran, India, Pakistan, and Israel—presents a special case requiring a customized political and security response that, of necessity, will involve a key role for the United States. Indeed, in the case of India, the United States has been wrestling with a new posture in relation to the India's status as a nuclear power. India's acquisition of nuclear weapons hardly reinforces the nonproliferation norm, so it presents a delicate challenge of setting terms that deal with reality while placing some responsibility on New Delhi.

⁷ Brian Katulis, Lawrence J. Korb, and Peter Juul, *Strategic Reset: Reclaiming Control of US Security in the Middle East*, Center for American Progress, Washington, DC, 2007.

The gist of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was fairly straightforward. States that did not have nuclear weapons would forswear them (Article II). Nations already possessing nuclear arsenals would ultimately disarm (Article VI). Finally, nonnuclear weapon states would receive help in harnessing nuclear technology for civilian purposes, with a rigid separation walling these activities off from military uses (Articles IV and V). As the United States struggles to keep nonnuclear weapon states from gaining weapons—and the Cold War fades into the past—it faces increased pressure regarding its own unfulfilled commitment to disarm. The NPT itself was sufficiently vague regarding disarmament by the nuclear weapon states that the United States cannot be found in legal violation, but the perception is widespread that the United States—and other weapons-possessing states—have let down their end of the bargain.⁸

With roughly 10,000 warheads remaining in the US nuclear arsenal, much of current US nuclear policy and posture remains a holdover from the Cold War. Continued maintenance and buildup of the arsenal is driven by a vague notion that the United States continues to face threats, including the threat of new and uncontrollable nuclear powers. It is not, however, grounded in spelled-out credible scenarios for how current or future levels of nuclear armament might actually be used in practice. The disjuncture between an American stance based largely on inertia and a normative regime under severe pressure confronts the United States with a trade-off: breathing life into the nonproliferation norm will likely require affirmative US steps toward keeping up the disarmament end of the NPT bargain.

US efforts to prevent and curb the spread of nuclear weapons should focus not on how to supplant the NPT but how to revitalize it based on fulfillment of its terms by the original nuclear powers. The essence of nonproliferation, the spirit of the law, must be to strengthen the taboo against nuclear weapons, regardless of whose weapons they are. Given the destructive power of nuclear weapons, lingering health effects of radiation, and danger of escalation following the use even of tactical systems, the use of these weapons is bound to elicit a moral revulsion more than outweighing any military advantage achieved. Accepting that, for this reason, a preemptive US nuclear strike is virtually inconceivable, a high-profile nuclear policy debate involving the president could shift the focus from asking how many weapons the United States could afford to cut to how many it needs for effective deterrence and retaliation. While a handful of holdouts in Congress might rail against letting down America's guard in a dangerous world, wider consensus would likely appreciate that the outsized arsenal poses a security problem, impedes nonproliferation objectives, and is not a security solution. A revision of US doctrine to minimize the role of nuclear weapons would not only give the rest of the world modest reassurance about US strategic intentions, but it could also pave the way for deep cuts in the size of nuclear forces globally.

There are early glimpses of emerging political consensus, notably in the collective effort of George Shultz, Henry Kissinger, Sam Nunn, and William Perry, to press for a reduction in the US nuclear arsenal as part of a broader reciprocal global effort to limit and ultimately eliminate nuclear weapons. Such bold approaches could be politically counterbalanced at home through the continuation and strengthening of measures to block and disrupt the efforts of would-be proliferators—raising not only the moral and political barriers to proliferation but the practical ones as well.⁹ Accordingly, cooperative threat reduction, continuation of President Bush's

⁸ Steven E. Miller, "US Nuclear Policy and International Law: Does Washington Have a Compliance Problem?" prepared for the International Conference on Nuclear Technology and Sustainable Development, Center for Strategic Research, Tehran, Iran, 2005.

⁹ This new political common ground in the rising generation is also exemplified by: Stephen E. Biegun and Jon B. Wolfsthal, "A Full-Court Press Against Nuclear Anarchy," *Bridging the Foreign Policy Divide*, ed. Derek Chollet, Tod Lindberg, and David Shorr, Routledge, New York, 2008, pages 86-102.

Proliferation Security Initiative, and nuclear intelligence should be integral to nuclear policy in the coming years.

One option raised by a recast role for US nuclear forces would be to adopt a posture of nuclear no first use. Even more significant for the long-term strength of the nonproliferation norm, it could pave the way to cuts in the US arsenal—and, by extension, in the forces of other nuclear powers—to a lesser deterrent force. These steps should be pursued as part of a multilateral framework—enabling the United States to maximize political support at home and multiply the impact of its own actions.

Because the United States and Russia hold the largest nuclear arsenals by far—together comprising 95% of all warheads in the world—reductions in their forces are the logical first step. Under the terms of the 2002 Moscow Treaty on Strategic Offensive Reductions, the two are slated to cut their deployed forces to 1,700-2,200 weapons by 2012. Two near-term steps could help make the Moscow Treaty a basis for further agreed mutual cuts: carrying forward the verification provisions of the START II (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) agreement and preserving the overall structure of the treaty past its 2012 deadline. Two leading experts on nuclear arms control have crafted a proposal to amend the Moscow Treaty to set a lower ceiling of reductions to 1,000 weapons apiece.¹⁰

An important preparatory step toward reductions to minimal levels will be a few key areas of technical work to confirm that existing weapons are still in working order, to keep them in that condition, and to dismantle those being removed from the arsenal safely and verifiably. Research by the US Department of Energy (DOE) should be accelerated regarding methods for verifying warhead safety and reliability through measures short of nuclear testing. This work is vital to pave the way for US ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, a necessary complement to the NPT. The test detonation of a nuclear weapon is the milestone that announces a country's arrival as a nuclear power. From a nonproliferation perspective, a nuclear test is an after-the-fact threshold, a trailing indicator. For future rounds of negotiated reductions, it will also be crucial to devise ways to enable intrusive arms control verification without compromising sensitive information about weapon design or operation. Such measures are essential to enabling the United States to scale back its nuclear posture comfortably and responsibly.

Minimal Nuclear Deterrents

Because Article VI of the NPT requires nuclear weapon states to progress toward eventual complete disarmament, even US-Russian bilateral reductions to 1,000 weapons would not constitute a once-and-for-all fulfillment of this obligation. However, such bilateral reductions could be a very important stepping stone toward sweeping reductions to truly low levels. Once the two biggest nuclear powers reach that level, their arsenals will no longer be vastly larger than any others, building pressure for all countries with nuclear weapons to join in reductions.¹¹

The next logical step would be for Russia and the United States to negotiate reductions with the other original Cold War powers of China, France, and the United Kingdom. In keeping with the concept of an arsenal only large enough to deter existential threats, the numerical limits in such a five-way treaty would leave sufficient forces able to survive and retaliate against any plausible

¹⁰ Sidney D. Drell and James E. Goodby, "What Are Nuclear Weapons For? Recommendations for Restructuring US Strategic Nuclear Forces," Arms Control Association, Washington, DC, 2005.

¹¹ The scheme given for reductions to minimal forces is based on David Holloway, "Further Reductions in Nuclear Forces: Paper Prepared for the Reykjavik II Conference," 2007, pages 22-28. Obtained from the author.

attack. One especially rigorous analysis of the options and strategic implications for deep nuclear reductions presents a scenario under which no nation has more than 200 nuclear weapons.¹²

Because of the way nuclear arms control treaties traditionally work, more ambitious arms control agreements would require a major leap in transparency. The counting rules of previous arms control agreements have focused on delivery systems—basing the official tally of warheads on multiples of the numbers of delivery vehicles, regardless of the fate of the warhead itself. As disarmament proceeds to minimal levels, this loophole is simply too large. To begin with, Russia and the United States will have several times more nuclear weapons, albeit decommissioned and removed from their delivery systems, than permitted under the specified treaty—hardly in line with the intention of Article VI. In order to get to low levels of nuclear warheads, the parties to the new agreements would need to verify that nuclear weapons had not only been decommissioned but dismantled. This is the point of the technical work by experts in the DOE national laboratories: devising ways to permit verification without compromising sensitive information about weapon design or operation.

The next wider circle would aim to bring in the “de facto” nuclear weapon states that never signed the NPT (India, Pakistan, and Israel), whose nuclear arsenals are all, in a sense, “demand-driven” by their geostrategic situation. Each of these nations can point out serious security threats to which their weapons are a response—in fact, two of the countries point at each other. Regardless of whether a thaw between Pakistan and India lessens their reliance on nuclear weapons, the two nations have been persistent critics of the older nuclear powers for failing to live up to the disarmament obligations of the NPT. Deep cuts by the original “permanent five” would effectively call their bluff.

Luring Israel into an agreement on reducing its nuclear arsenal is even more complicated, given that it has spent decades demurring any public acknowledgment of its arsenal. Such an agreement is inconceivable absent a comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but potentially realistic after such a settlement has proven its strength and durability over a period of years.

All of this leaves the question of cutting all nuclear arsenals to zero. Abolition would pose political, strategic, and technical complexities of a different order. However daunting these difficulties might be, it is possible they will be counterbalanced considerably by an overall reduction in tensions and military competition.

Dealing With Iran

While it will take several years for the nuclear powers to fulfill their part of the nonproliferation bargain, certain urgent nonproliferation challenges cannot wait. For the United States the priority is clear. Iran is simultaneously at the top of the nonproliferation agenda, a critical frontline state neighboring both Iraq and Afghanistan, and a state sponsor of terrorists operating in and around Israel.

Not only does Iran pose a compelling set of strategic challenges for the United States, its position raises fundamental issues about the workings of the international order. Can a government that is repressive internally improve its global standing by adopting a less threatening outward military posture? What role should leading global powers play—collectively and individually—in holding other countries to international norms, including nonproliferation?

Recent experience offers a few critical lessons for how to responsibly handle nations at the threshold of obtaining nuclear arsenals. First of all, it is not effective for Washington merely to

¹² Ibid.

issue decrees and demands for the target regime to capitulate—especially when matters are clouded by a message that the real problem is the regime itself. As long as Iran’s leaders perceive that nothing short of surrendering power will ease external pressures, their imperative to arm themselves against a perceived existential threat originating in the United States is reinforced.

From the US side, given the stakes and time pressures, the best way to pursue US nonproliferation, regional security, and counterterrorism interests with Iran is through direct and wide-ranging talks. The just-around-the-corner urgency of the Iranian nuclear threat was over-hyped, to be sure, but Iran clearly is indeed drawing closer to a nuclear weapon capability with each passing year. The November 2007 US National Intelligence Estimate provides evidence of Iran’s suspended military effort to develop a weapon and gives a sober assessment of the time horizon for a possible Iranian nuclear capability. The fact that Iran is several years away from a nuclear capability opens the diplomatic window of opportunity.

Reaching a diplomatic settlement will be difficult, since even a committed effort may fail. Yet if it drags on, with wasteful pauses, the certain result will be a nuclear-armed Iran, just as it was with North Korea. So while coordination with other powers and multilateral venues such as the UNSC and IAEA remains important, the United States must keep the focus on sustaining momentum and taking advantage of the narrowing window in which Iran’s nuclear capacity remains nascent.

Key elements of such a bargaining process—built around a succession of reciprocal, contingent, trust-building measures—must include Tehran’s cooperation with the IAEA on the monitoring of its purportedly civilian nuclear program: safeguards, inspections, seals, and other disclosures sought by the agency. This could build toward a set of tailored and intrusive monitoring measures by which the IAEA could verify the civilian nature of Iran’s nuclear activities, cap the size of its enrichment facility, and strictly account for all fissile material.

In response, the United States would gradually remove sanctions, beginning with the lifting of diplomatic constraints and ultimately helping Iran upgrade its oil and gas industries

The exchange of nuclear nonproliferation and transparency for economic integration is a bargain that has been pursued—though not yet all the way to successful implementation—with North Korea, but differences weigh in favor of at least trying a similar approach with Iran. Unlike North Korea, Iran has not yet built nuclear weapons. It has a stronger interest in global economic integration and is in a stronger bargaining position in that it has a bona fide civilian nuclear program and thus a legitimate reason to pursue key aspects of nuclear development. The NPT not only permits but also encourages civilian nuclear power as long as a nonnuclear weapon state does not initiate a military program and keeps its activities transparent.

So in effect, Iran still has plausible deniability in claiming civilian purposes for its uranium enrichment program. That enrichment program, and its implied technical prowess, is now firmly staked as a point of Iranian national pride. Iran simply will not forswear enrichment entirely. Ambassadors Thomas Pickering and William Luers and MIT’s Jim Walsh, who have spent five years in private discussions with Iranians, share this conclusion.¹³ Weighing in favor of an Iranian leadership interest in nonproliferation, however, that nation also has a dynamic political system and somewhat empowered populace—thereby raising the potential costs for any regime viewed

¹³ William Luers, Thomas Pickering, and Jim Walsh, “A Solution for the US-Iran Nuclear Standoff,” *The New York Review of Books*, March 20, 2008.

domestically as a willing pariah that puts its appetite for nuclear weapons ahead of the economic needs of its people.

Beyond the nuclear issue, Iran's role in the region—the Persian Gulf as well as the Levant—will be integral to any comprehensive bilateral negotiation. Despite the heated election-year debate over whether to talk to Iran, the United States and Iran have actually been in dialogue over Iraq (and before that, over Afghanistan) for years. Such regional diplomacy will only grow in importance as the United States withdraws its forces from Iraq. Indeed, the rationale for withdrawal is based on an assessment that the military presence in reality gives the United States very little leverage over the ultimate outcome in Iraq.

Ultimately, a full rapprochement with Iran cannot be reached until Tehran's backing of Hezbollah and Hamas ends. The key to a normal bilateral US-Iranian relationship will be Iran's acceptance of a sovereign and secure Israel—the test of which would be support for a two-state solution and a decisive cutoff of military support for Hezbollah and Hamas, to help spur their transformation into purely political actors.

Until a comprehensive deal with Iran is concluded, the United States will reserve the option of military action in case Iran negates the diplomatic process through hostile or threatening actions. The credible threat of force is a vital complement to intensive bilateral diplomacy with an unpredictable and at times menacing counterpart. Without it, the process would no doubt go through periods of drift, at an unaffordable loss of time. It should be noted, though, that the US unilateral removal of a nonnuclear Saddam Hussein and the aggressive saber-rattling toward Iran have left the impression that the use of force is not a threat, but a promise.

Once Iran demonstrated willingness to submit to the nonproliferation regime and renounce terrorism, the tables would turn and the burden of proof of nonaggression would shift decisively. In other words, if Iran takes steps to reduce the threat it poses toward others, it is only fair that it should not remain on the receiving end of threats. For this reason negative security assurances from the United States—a US promise not to use force against Iran except in response to an Iranian act of military aggression—will be a necessary element of eventual resumed diplomatic relations between the United States and Iran.

The International Community and the Global Economy

As the world's largest economy and the home to pivotal financial markets, banks, and multinational corporations, the US position of leadership rests in significant part on America's roles as an engine and a guardian of global prosperity. As the 2008 subprime mortgage crisis illustrated, despite the emergence of other international economic power centers, when the US economy sneezes, the world still catches cold. Accordingly, US actions and accountability in relation to the global economy will be key measures of whether not just Washington, but also New York, Chicago, and Silicon Valley have fulfilled their responsibilities as stakeholders in the global order.

Given that the world's leading financial center, New York, comes within its purview, the United States must approach its financial regulatory responsibilities with a global perspective. US failure to anticipate and guard against the fallout from the meltdown of subprime mortgages was grossly negligent and is projected to cause \$1 trillion in global economic damage. Complacency about low liquidity levels and willful ignorance about precariousness of the exotic financial instruments that were used to repackage unsound mortgage debt made the credit crisis all but inevitable. It will not be a simple matter to craft regulations that will anticipate and manage risk without stifling growth and innovation, but the credit crunch has served notice to the United States and the world about the global reverberations of US

financial regulation. While it would be facile to offer a specific prescription, acting responsibly clearly requires taking steps to rectify these shortcomings.

Globalization and Trade

Another critical test is trade. As a primary author of the global trade system, American leadership is vital as the global trade system comes under mounting diplomatic and political challenge. In terms of both upholding the current rules and, as importantly, reshaping them to fold in new stakeholders and address emerging challenges, the US commitment and initiative are indispensable.

Clearly trade and globalization have stirred deep domestic political rifts. Despite the American public's apparent desire to restore alliances and rebuild the US global image, the populace harbors substantial ambivalence about free trade and its associated dislocations. During the 2008 election cycle, regardless of whether or not citizens' own personal circumstances were affected by trade, the North American Free Trade Agreement became shorthand for why many Americans feel economically insecure.

The idea that the United States should "put a brake" on free trade is both fanciful and self-destructive. To fulfill its responsibilities as a global stakeholder, the United States must categorically reject any notion that resurrecting trade barriers is a viable route to greater domestic prosperity or security. That said, there can be no durable consensus embracing free trade absent urgent measures to prevent and redress the unavoidable and serious dislocations stemming from fulsome US participation in the global economy. Preventing these threats from throwing a political wrench into the workings of the trading system has emerged as a central element of the US global economic leadership.

One important piece of the protective social safety net is already at the top of the American domestic political agenda: universal health insurance. Other key protections include bolstering unemployment insurance, trade adjustment assistance and retraining that actually leads to well paying jobs, raising the minimum wage, the earned income tax credit, access to childcare, and the affordability of higher education.

The United States must also address the problem of individual trade agreements that are seen as directly undermining to American workers, to the global environment, and to global labor rights and norms. Integration of practical and finely-tuned labor and environmental standards into trade agreements will pave the way for such accords to be approved.

Criticisms of the US free trade embrace do not stop at the US borders. The large numbers of people worldwide for whom the global economy seems more of a threat than an opportunity are increasingly asking why their nations should play by the rules. Zbigniew Brzezinski warned of a potential "counter-creed" to globalization, whereby mass sentiment coalesces into coherent, focused hostility toward globalization, and, by extension, the United States as the world's greatest economic power.¹⁴ The antidote, he says, is for the United States to "treat globalization less as a gospel and more as an opportunity for the betterment of the human condition...The pursuit of open markets should not be an end in itself, but a means of improving economic conditions worldwide."¹⁵

Preventing a global backlash from impeding continued US economic growth through trade will require realization of the original promise of the Doha Round as an equalizer of the benefits of

¹⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Choice, Global Domination or Global Leadership*, Basic Books, New York, 2004, pages 151-163.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 161.

globalization, even if this cannot be achieved—in the near term—by reaching a new global trade agreement. The case for trade as a driver of development is severely undermined by the skewing of the benefits from the prior Uruguay Round toward developed nations and the sizable tariffs they still collect from less developed countries.

A strategy that treats trade talks purely as an opportunity to gain advantage for Western negotiating partners will produce an inherently brittle structure. Industrialized powers have sought the free flow of capital, high-skill services, and legally protected intellectual property, while keeping a tight clamp on agriculture and low-skill labor—an unsustainable position from the standpoint of norms. While no nation can be expected to put aside consideration of the near-term domestic economic impact of trade proposals, the United States must be seen to acknowledge the wider and longer-range implications of its trade positions on the global system.

The United States has demonstrated the capacity to lead in this area, adopting positions more constructive than those of the European Union. The United States is credited with low tariffs on agricultural products and, in relative terms, low agricultural subsidies for many commodities. Yet US trade barriers on textiles and apparel and some of the remaining agricultural subsidies are criticized for squeezing the livelihoods of African citizens eager to join the world economy. Addressing this issue through a progressive reduction of these tariffs would yield tangible development gains and help remove a major source of global criticism against the United States. Continued and expanded leadership in this arena will reverberate: strengthening the global trading system, ensuring that its rifts and shortcomings are not blamed on the United States, and setting an example that promotes more constructive stances among others.

Migration is another arena in which US policy has wide ripple effects and one that will be closely followed by those watching and judging America's standing as a stakeholder. American economic success in a globalizing world will depend not merely on containing post-9/11 xenophobia against immigrants and visitors but on maintaining a steady stream of both. The tightening of visa restrictions has put the United States beyond reach for many talented foreigners seeking educational and economic opportunity. These promising would-be migrants are increasingly focusing their ambitions on other Western countries. The private sector and the science and technology lobbies have raised serious concerns about the potential costs to the economy of such restrictions. While such policies are proving self-defeating in practical ways, they are also undermining more than a century of global perceptions of the United States as an open frontier for opportunity seekers. This openness has been a prominent symbol of America's global leadership, building bridges between populations worldwide and diaspora groups in the United States and setting a standard for other Western countries. By backing away from this openness, the United States would undermine what is almost universally viewed as a fundamentally American value and historic contribution.

In a related but distinct category, the United States should also broaden its acceptance of refugees from global humanitarian crises and, specifically, Iraq; accepting refugees who by definition are not able to be in their own country is a responsibility according to international law and a global public good. If it is not seen to do its fair share, and particularly to take care of victims of crises that the United States has itself precipitated, the US risks being seen as unwilling either to deal with the consequences of its own actions or to acknowledge its moral responsibility to others.

The Challenge of Climate Change

There are few issues that crystallize the questions of responsible global citizenship as distinctly as the challenge of global climate change. The analogy to citizenship in a domestic polity is quite direct: polluters, those who refuse to clean up after themselves, and

those who stand outside—and thereby undermine—the preservation of the environment for public benefit are obvious civic delinquents.

The debate over global climate change is not amenable to easy prescriptions and this essay will not attempt to devise a blueprint for US positions. It is clear, however, that its rejection of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol puts the United States in the position of having to make up for lost ground when it comes to credibility as a steward of the global environment.

To be seen to offer leadership befitting its global stature, the United States will need to take a number of steps. The heart of the matter is a trade-off between the need for urgent action and the desire for ambitious, binding, and comprehensive limits on greenhouse gases applicable to all nations, including the world's fast-growing developing economies, mostly notably China. The United States needs to approach global climate change negotiations with an open mind, accepting the prospect of limits that are enforceable for Western countries before they are made binding on the world's largest developing economies, such as China and India. The arguments against such an approach may be logical in principle but will in practice risk negating any prospect of a broad-ranging accord to prevent environmental catastrophe. By adopting a long-term perspective focused on the value of achieving universal binding limits in the medium term, the United States can adopt a posture that is constructive and that balances US interests against the imperative of an agreement that applies to all major emitters. Abdication based on the already moribund principle of uniform binding targets will not be an option. Domestic and international opinions have both reached the point at which action on global warming is considered mandatory.

In contrast to just a few years ago, the impetus to tackle greenhouse gases has gelled domestically in the United States such that domestic and international political imperatives, if carefully managed, could converge. The presidential nominees of both parties have stressed the imperative to act. Legislative momentum for a cap and trade system of emissions allowances has built. Pressure has mounted for higher fuel economy standards for vehicles. Spiraling fuel prices have transformed fuel efficiency from a matter of principle to an even more compelling matter for the pocketbook. Numerous state and municipal governments have taken initiative to enact more stringent standards. The private sector has shown its belief in the promise and political imperative of green technology with investments (both venture capitalists and large cap companies such as General Electric). More so than previously, the potential exists for political leaders to muster the domestic consensus necessary for action.

Development Assistance

The US role as a global citizen has long entailed concern for the disadvantaged of other nations. Just as leading citizens are measured by their charitable giving, wealthy countries are expected to do their fair share in terms of global development and humanitarian aid. The United States ranks too low as an aid donor among the world's wealthiest countries. Much of this aid is channeled to countries like Egypt that have particular political significance for the United States, rather than to countries where the need is greatest. Although the Bush administration has promised innovation and increased generosity in the arena of development aid, the results have been mixed. Over the last eight years, the United States has positioned itself as a global leader in the fight against HIV/AIDS and other global diseases, earning respect and goodwill that—more than any other policy—has provided a counterweight against the negative impact of the Bush years on global public perceptions. US leadership in the recovery mission after the Asian tsunami in 2005 had a similar effect, buoying US popularity in the region. Unfortunately, the much-heralded Millennium Challenge Account, an effort to link development aid to good governance, has been underfunded and slow-moving, falling well short of its targets.

Responsibly addressing the impact of ethanol production and other factors on global food prices is another critical test. Calls for the United States to bolster aid to the World Food Programme and to liberalize policies that govern where US food aid is sourced in order to bolster local production around the world should be heeded. In the longer term, US development aid and multilateral assistance need to focus on promoting agriculture in the developing world, including support for new technologies to increase crop yields which have been in a decades-long decline. Efforts to raise the US ranking and reputation as an aid donor will quell criticisms of the United States as ungenerous and will shape positive perceptions both among other leading donors and among recipient governments and their regions.

As Others See Us

International politics shares some of the same verities as domestic politics. In both arenas, the perceptions, expectations, and interests of others matter a great deal, and no political actor can ignore them without paying a price in the loss of influence. The explicit codes of conduct that are spelled out in international law are a necessary but insufficient condition for a robust rules-based international order. Such an order rests not only on clear standards for what is right and wrong, but also on broadly shared faith in the order's fairness, equity, reciprocity, commonweal, and balance of interests.

A nation's material power can be measured in fairly simple terms. On the one hand, military and economic strength may be arduous to acquire, but relatively easy to gauge. Moral authority, on the other hand, is more subjective and has no indices equivalent to GDP or naval fleet tonnage. Yet the moral high ground is politically a very powerful place, and it cannot be unilaterally claimed or declared. In other words, legitimacy is in the collective eyes of the beholders.

Both because of the threat posed by the disintegration of global norms and because of the US national interest in shaping the terms that govern the international system, the United States has compelling reasons to reposition itself as a leading force in refashioning the international order. This leaves the United States with a (hopefully creative) tension. At its best, a consensual global system can bolster community standards and marshal collective action to tackle problems. At the same time, it is also prone to lowest-common-denominator politics and inconclusive diplomatic drift. So at the moment the United States confronts a dire need to replenish credibility by deferring to international expectations, there will also be an ongoing need for the United States to remain the backbone of the world community, helping ensure that norms are upheld rather than watered down.

If the first step is to admit to the problem, the erosion of US credibility has created a harsh reality. US effectiveness as a global backbone is severely compromised by the decline in its international standing. That is why so many of the near-term recommendations above are essentially concessions—in the international political dynamic of legitimacy, the United States will only be able to press its concerns and win wider support once our stores of trust and goodwill have been restocked.

This is not to say that the United States would or should, after it regains legitimacy, revert to a posture of many demands and few concessions. The United States should neither indulge in nor reflexively fend off what the rest of the world expects of it. Instead, the United States must sift through those expectations to determine not only their implications for US interests, but also their consistency with international norms and resonance for other members of the world community.

Indeed, the United States may find a rigorous approach to legitimacy to be surprisingly beneficial. It could be quite invigorating to make legitimacy the old-fashioned way: by earning it, rather than

presuming it as a national birthright. Among other things, this would require the United States to keep its diplomatic antennae extended and well-tuned. It would entail greater awareness of international perceptions, more conscious choices on issues that US global image and, by extension, gaining increased control over that image.

As US leaders embark on the project of rehabilitating US legitimacy, it is vital that they not underestimate the task. Neither the inauguration of a new president nor measures to mitigate the errors of his predecessor will bring the United States back into a constructive relationship to the rules-based international order. In fact, according to the approach outlined above, legitimacy is not a static end state to be achieved but an ongoing dynamic undertaking. This may be—under some traditions of American national pride—a less gratifying stance. Nevertheless, it squares better with how the world really works, is apt to be more effective and is, in the end, in line with democratic traditions of renewal through continuous critical reassessment. As with so many such issues, it also upholds traditions of the republic’s founders who at its inception called on our nation to pay “a decent respect to the opinions of mankind.”

Nikolas Gvosdev’s Reaction

Suzanne Nossel and David Shorr have sketched out an ambitious plan for restoring the world’s faith in the efficacy of American leadership of the community of nations. I find myself somewhat less sanguine about the prospects for success, under current conditions.

To begin, while the policies of the Bush administration, particularly in its execution of the Iraq war, exacerbated and accelerated a number of negative trends, there is no “reset button” to return to the status quo of 2000 or 1992. The ongoing diffusion of power, particularly in its economic and financial manifestations, to more and more states makes it difficult for the United States to reclaim the mantle of unquestioned leadership.

In the past, American primacy was derived in large part from the ability of the United States to generate an international system that guaranteed free and open lines of communication, provided for free trade, and promoted regional security. Today, however, there are rising concerns that the United States, to use the description of Flynt Leverett, is a “dysfunctional hegemon” whose policies are seen as damaging to the interests of other states.¹⁶ It is correct that closing the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, combined with an announcement of US commitment to negotiations for a new climate change arrangement to replace Kyoto and steps to wind down the Iraq War, will improve the US image and may even bring a short honeymoon period for the next administration. Over the long run, however, US leadership will depend less on how it treats detainees or whether it is seen as an honest broker in the Arab-Israeli peace process and more on whether the international system it sustains can manage problems like the food and fuel crises and spread the burden of challenges like climate change between developed and developing countries.

I would also raise a cautionary point: It may not always be enough for the United States to take the lead in “solving” a problem if other states are uneasy about the associated methods and precedents. In theory, the Kosovo problem was “solved” earlier this year when the province declared independence and had its new status recognized by the United States and most of the countries of Europe. But the manner in which these things were done has thus far failed to bring greater stability to the Balkans; again the European Union (EU) exposed its inability to formulate

¹⁶ Flynt Leverett, “Black Is the New Green,” *The National Interest*, January/February 2008, page 44.

a common position and reopened a divide between the developed “North and West” and the rising “South and East.”

The debate itself is also shifting—from whether the United States should “obey the rules” to whether or not “the rules” as they stand promote or impede the interests of other countries. In theory, yes, there is agreement around the world that international cooperation enhances peace and prosperity—but operationalizing the rules, procedures, and institutions is far more contentious—even here in the United States.

It is not simply that there is ambivalence toward the international system among both the American people and their elites—but something approaching schizophrenia. For instance, the United States wants leaders in Sudan or Burma to be accountable to international institutions for their dereliction of duty vis-à-vis their own populations but argues that bodies like the International Criminal Court should not have jurisdiction over US officials. US politicians on both sides of the aisle trumpet the virtues of an association of the world’s democracies, yet, when it comes to banning landmines and cluster bombs or controlling weapons exports, the United States finds itself aligned against almost all other democratic states and in the company of countries like Pakistan, India, Russia, and China. The United States complains that China and Russia’s veto power in the UN Security Council inhibits that body from taking effective action; yet from 1986 to 2007, of the 53 vetoes cast, 36 were by the United States (and another 11 by Britain and France). By and large, Americans do support a more robust international order—but many make that support contingent on a system conforming to US preferences or giving Washington near total freedom of action, particularly when it comes to the use of force—expectations that were unrealistic even at the height of the unipolar moment of the 1990s.

This domestic incoherence is complemented by a growing international divide between two distinct interpretations of what a “rules-based” international system should be. (I use the shorthand of “Beijing” and “Brussels” to refer to these two poles.¹⁷) “Brussels” reflects the view that strong, independent international institutions which can limit, bypass, and override the sovereignty of individual states are needed to enforce the rules and to ensure desired outcomes; the sovereign state is de-emphasized in favor of international bodies which look out for the welfare of individuals and serve as a check on national power. For proponents of the “Beijing approach,” the international order operates on the basis of contractual obligations taken on by sovereign states; they are interpreted and enforced in the course of a state’s bilateral and multilateral relationships. International politics, to quote Weber and his colleagues, is managed “through a neo-Westphalian synthesis comprised of hard-shell states who bargain with each other about the terms of their external relationships, but staunchly respect the rights of each to order its own society, politics and culture without external interference.”¹⁸ The challenge confronting the United States (and the EU) is not simply that the “Beijing model” appeals to nondemocratic regimes but that many of the “Southern democracies” tilt more toward “Beijing” than “Brussels”—something made quite clear in 2008, when India, Brazil, and South Africa aligned themselves with China and Russia in response to Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence

¹⁷ Harry Harding describes this as the division between “reformers”—mainly Western states, and the “conservatives”—led by Russia and China, with the former emphasizing responsive, autonomous international institutions and the latter defending state sovereignty. Presentation at “The Rise of the Rest: How the Ascent of Russia and China Affects Global Business and Security,” Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs, New York City, July 1, 2008. Transcript available at <http://www.policyinnovations.org/ideas/briefings/data/000066>.

¹⁸ Naazneen Barma, Ely Ratner, and Steven Weber, “A World Without the West,” *The National Interest*, July/August 2007, No. 90, page 25.

and when Asian and African states rejected the links drawn by France and other Western states between the “responsibility to protect” and the catastrophic failure of the Rangoon regime to provide aid to the people of Burma in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis. For a majority of the world’s states, the role of a “rules-based” system is to serve the interests of states (and those states’ rulers)—not citizens. This growing concern with sovereignty was on display in recent comments of Brazil’s ambassador to the United States, Antonio de Aguiar Patriota, on efforts to protect the environment and increase energy supplies. Ambassador Patriota said Brazil welcomed “international cooperation” but stressed that “the necessary policies and measures to ensure the sustainable use of natural resources fall unquestionably under the sovereign jurisdictions of the countries” concerned.¹⁹

While America is largely in alignment with most of the goals and outcomes sought by proponents of the “Brussels model”—a more liberal, democratic, and transparent world order—it is suspicious about the transfer of sovereignty “Brussels” entails. “Beijing’s” stress on nation-state prerogatives is more appealing—except that many of the partisans of the “Beijing approach” seem to want to use sovereignty to protect a whole host of odious regimes from international, especially US, pressure. This is the context for various “League of Democracies” proposals—attempts to create a world order where nondemocracies might be subject to “Brussels rules” (e.g. active intervention into their domestic affairs) but where democracies would play by “Beijing rules” in their relations with each other.²⁰ I agree with the criticisms Nossel and Shorr make, but think that this idea will continue to have a good deal of bipartisan resonance in Washington in the years ahead and will indeed complicate consensus-building efforts among the major powers, both democracies and nondemocracies, both of the developed “North and West” and the rising “South and East.” Such proposals will also continue to inspire efforts to bypass the United Nations and search for “coalitions of the willing” in dealing with international problems—which will certainly not enhance the development of a global, rules-based system.

At the same time, it is also unrealistic to expect that expanding the membership of key global institutions (UN Security Council, Group of Eight, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, etc.) to encompass more states of the global “South and East” will solve the problem. Such countries will not automatically become more supportive of a US or even of a broadly Western agenda simply out of gratitude for being able to join these exclusive clubs and have a seat at the table.

The practical way forward might be the formal retention of the postwar international order but with an ongoing process by which new understandings—some formal, some not—could be negotiated among the major powers, principally resulting from an ongoing dialogue among the United States, the EU, and China, with the participation of other key actors like India and Russia. This process might then be able to set basic global standards and ensure the adherence of the major powers. Indeed, I predict that we will see a move away from comprehensive treaties and in favor of more limited agreements dealing with specific items—eschewing formal organizations in favor of ad hoc, issued-oriented partnerships.

This could end up being a much more ad hoc process than the authors might like. It would likely produce few enforceable rules in favor of “voluntary mandates” assumed by nation-states and

¹⁹ Statement released by the Embassy of Brazil, May 21, 2008, at http://www.brasilemb.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=348&Itemid=124.

²⁰ Robert Kagan makes this quite clear when, in discussing international regulations, he writes, “they chiefly provide democratic nations the right to intervene in the affairs of nondemocratic nations.” “The End of the End of History,” *The New Republic*, April 23, 2008.

regional organizations at the global level, and indeed a shift from “binding regulations” to “basic standards.” In particular, it may require significant compromises on both norms and policies.²¹ Minister Xie Feng, Deputy Chief of Mission of the Chinese Embassy in Washington, noted earlier this year that the People’s Republic of China was not simply another stakeholder but one of the “constructive partners” of the United States in forging the global order. Acknowledging that Beijing and the United States “do not see eye to eye on everything,” he expressed the hope “that the United States will meet us halfway” in crafting solutions.²² Iran may prove to be a test case as to whether Washington is prepared to make such a compromise in return for obtaining the full support of a meaningful global coalition.²³

One of the “basic standards” that would need to be negotiated would be the terms by which other states would again accept and accommodate US leadership of the global system—in return for more explicit limits and constraints on the exercise of US power around the world. For instance, I do not foresee meaningful progress on efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons even if the United States were to take much more decisive action since there would always be a lingering suspicion that the United States’ true objective is not to make the world safer but to remove any remaining impediments to US military action by freeing its formidable conventional capabilities from the fear of retaliation.

Such a suspicion is entirely reasonable, given recent history. In the aftermath of the 1999 Kosovo war and the 2003 invasion of Iraq, it became clear that the lack of UN Security Council authorization was no ipso facto impediment to the United States launching a military intervention, even at the expense of a perceived lack of legitimacy. At the same time, the targeted Yugoslav and Iraqi regimes had no appreciable deterrent capabilities, while Iran and North Korea—perceived to be closer to crossing the nuclear threshold—have been engaged primarily through diplomatic means. The appeal of nuclear weapons will diminish not simply because the United States decides to live up to its Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty obligations, but only if other states become convinced that countries like the United States (or a future rising China) are severely constrained in their ability to use overwhelming conventional force.

US leadership will also depend on the extent to which the United States is prepared to reassess its level of involvement in world affairs. On the one hand, on issues such as a peace settlement for the Middle East, the United States will need to be a major participant, as Nossel and Shorr note. On the other hand, several rising powers are now active embryonic intergovernmental organizations that did not exist ten years ago (the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum) but which are developing capabilities and marshalling resources that significantly amplify the role of these powers—perhaps even enabling them to bypass or ignore the United States. Should Washington try to thwart groups that offer no

²¹ This would not preclude regional organizations, of course, from proceeding with enacting more stringent rules or even transferring sovereignty from the nation-state to transnational bodies, a process much more advanced in Europe and in its first stages in South America, for instance.

²² “Roundtable With Minister Xie Feng,” The Nixon Center, Washington, DC, May 6, 2008.

²³ No country in the world has expressed support for Iran obtaining nuclear weapons. There are significant disagreements, though, over: whether and how Iran should have access to a nuclear fuel cycle; possible linkages between talks on the nuclear program and Iran's position on Israel and its support for rejectionist Palestinian groups; and possible negative security assurances. This tangle of issues does not bode well for the emergence of a new international consensus.

leadership role—or can the United States become more comfortable with a “concert of powers” approach (or [Franklin D. Roosevelt] FDR’s vision of the “world’s policemen”)?²⁴

It is important but not sufficient for a leader to occupy the moral high ground. In shaping the post-World War II world, FDR and his team were inspired by principles but also pragmatic enough to make needed trade-offs—including those that directly contradicted some of those ideals—to ensure that other major powers signed on (the veto power of the permanent five members of the UN Security Council being one such example). It is not enough for the United States to “follow the rules”; the rules must also be actively embraced by the other stakeholders. The postwar European-American partnership (especially as reflected in the International Monetary Fund and The World Bank) had sufficient heft to set the agenda. Today, new dialogues—especially the Sino-American one—will be critical for reshaping the international order. What results from this may not be the ideal. The goal, however, should not be to set idealistic rules that no one, especially the United States, will follow, but instead to strengthen the habits of international cooperation. Such habits may not even be formally defined or codified—we may need to think of “rules” less in terms of law and more as guidelines.

We have been presented with an ambitious agenda, but it may serve us to have a more modest backup plan in place.

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209 Iowa Avenue | Muscatine, IA 52761 USA

563-264-1500 | 563-264-0864 fax | info@stanleyfoundation.org

²⁴ For instance, there has always been a certain ambivalence about a prominent diplomatic role for the EU in dealing with Iran's nuclear program. Another example of American suspicion toward multilateral initiatives not "made in the US" was apparent in the Bush Administration's tepid comments on President Nicolas Sarkozy's July 2008 "Union of the Mediterranean" summit. Daily Press Briefing, July 14, 2008, at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2008/july/106986.htm>.