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The Future of American Foreign Policy

Competing forces of integration and fragmentation in the 21st century raise the importance of the United States as an actor of the international field. While the world is not unraveling, shown in increased economic interdependence and decreased violence, America will be called on to enforce the status quo and help keep the globe from succumbing to disintegration. With the 2016 presidential election quickly approaching, it is imperative that the remaining candidates—Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump—are scrutinized in their foreign policy ideals and goals. In coming years, the United States should work to restore its place in the world by improving the country from within, fostering strong alliances abroad, and remaining committed to combating injustices against human rights where possible. In the longer term, the United States should accept their role as a superpower utilizing both soft and hard power to assert its influence and American values. This will include recognizing the nation's limits as well as creating coalition abroad on shared interests. In the next four years, the coming president of the United States will make crucial decisions as to how the country will use its power to bring the world together—or allow fear and fragmentation to drive divisions. While these goals and values should help to define foreign policy, I argue that policy should not be dictated by one doctrine. The best approach to foreign relations today and in the future will come from politics of pragmatism, free of mandated strategizing or organizing principles.

FRAGMENTING CHALLENGES

The greatest challenges facing the world today are those of fragmentation. Right now, the areas the next president must address include immigration, the Middle East, and rising powers in Asia. Within our own nation, fragmenting forces and fear are driving many to reject those that are considered different; this is seen in policies seeking to limit entry to the country through physical structures and bans based wholly on religion proposed by Donald Trump. Also at this time, society is more exposed to violence than ever before. With a media obsessed with eye-catching violent headlines and greater access to news through technology, we are more exposed to violence. However, looking at statistics, violence in the world is declining (Mack, 2014). When ubiquitous fear from this misconception is directed towards certain groups by media and politicians, emotions skew public opinion on issues such as immigration. Challenges facing the next president will include how to handle balance unraveling in this issue. Next, the Middle East poses numerous problems in Syria, Israel-Palestine conflict, and containment of Iran. Recent developments in the region, as discussed by Simon and Stevenson in “*The End of Pax Americana*,” have led to changes in American involvement. Loss of strong American allies through intensification of jihadism, lessened U.S. dependence on Gulf oil, and waning influence from pro-Western groups has led to a pull-back from the United States in the region. The next administration will have to make decisions in the Middle East following the post-9/11 period of interventions. Lastly, the United States faces challenges in its dealings with rising powers in Asia. In the article “*How to Manage a Rising Power – or Two*,” Kori Schake and Anja Manuel compare the United States powerful position with that of Britain in the late 19th century. Britain at this time encountered rising powers of Germany and the United States. Britain’s treatment of each was very different—with greater favorability towards the U.S. Now, we look to the rising

powers of China and India. Peaceful diplomacy and accommodation has been utilized in India; for instance, President Obama just recently met with Prime Minister Modi of India to further their partnership on such issues as global warming (Iyengar, 2016). Less of this level of partnership and goodwill has been seen in relations with China. Balancing the rising power of China, while promoting its integration in Asia and with the U.S. will be a great challenge facing the next president.

PRAGMATIC POLITICS

Instead of subscribing to a single policy doctrine, the next president should further the strategy of pragmatism in international relations seen in the Obama administration. Noah Gordon discusses the idea of an “organizing principle” by contrasting the policies of George W. Bush and Barack Obama. Bush fiercely subscribed to an organizing principle of “War on Terror” leading to foolish war, while Obama has navigated an increasingly volatile Middle East with relative success without any clear organizing principle (Gordon, 2014). The perils of a finite doctrine are also exposed in the problems that arise with the United States’ ritual of producing a national security strategy, examined in an article by David Edelstein and Ronald Krebs. Strategizing in this way forces leaders to create simplistic rallying cries that can later force decisions not fitting to every situation or prompt other nation’s to respond to perceived threats, which are not yet real. To combat these forces, America needs to adopt a new normalcy in foreign policy that allows for greater flexibility and situational decision-making—one of pragmatism. Pragmatism encourages narrative pluralism—often replaced today by a single dominant narrative—and would encourage consideration of threats on their own terms (Edelstein, 2015). This approach would place focus on setting realistic goals, allowing for

strategizing more regularly with more voices heard, and situational approaches to arising conflict. While pragmatism must guide decision-making, American values and goals of a peaceful, globalized future will motive actions into the future.

STRATEGIES

Improving from Within. In order to pursue sound and influential foreign policy, the U.S. must make strides to improve domestically, therefore improving reputation globally. Economically, improvements have been made in the most recent years that must be maintained. Socially, the country should conform to international norms by ending questionable policies such as Guantanamo. But perhaps most importantly, the next president must address the issue of immigration and rights of refugees that is separating the nation from the rest of the world. As President Obama stated in November of 2014, “My fellow Americans, we are and always will be a nation of immigrants” (Obama, 2014). To create a world of integration, the United States must first commit to becoming a nation of integration. Welcoming immigrants and refugees solidifies American values of acceptance and freedom, yet divisive rhetoric continues to complicate these policies. Trump’s harmful propositions, such as mass deportation, only feed the fears that create fragmentation within the U.S. Foreign policy at this time, while guided by integrating objectives, should remain pragmatic. A realistic cap on Syrian refugees should be set and the Mexican-American border should not be left unpatrolled, goals Hillary Clinton propose and Obama has pursued. The next administration needs to consider the values they project and align those with that of the United States and of a world coming together to create domestic improvement.

Recognizing Limitations. Historically, American foreign policy has ranged from staunch isolation to unapologetic internationalism. In today's complex, globalizing world, an important aspect of foreign policy will be the need to restrict American intervention to achievable goals. As discussed in "*The End of Pax Americana*," the United States foreign policy in the Middle East will benefit from restraint in intervention (Simon, 2015). In the late 20th century, the U.S. acted as a status quo power in the Middle East—only directly intervening in extraordinary cases. Following 9/11 attacks in 2001, the United States pursued a much more aggressive approach to relations in the Middle East, shaping a new standard of U.S. involvement. Now that we have seen failures and struggles in the Middle East lead to continued instability, it is important that in the near future America focuses on feasible goals. There are a host of factors in the international system today that thwart total American dominance. As recently seen, large nations are losing in asymmetric wars due to shifting warfare and waning public support (Mack, 1975). The United States must recognize where its drawbacks are and make decisions in foreign policy with those in mind. This means holding back from direct military intervention in the Middle East and recognizing that goals like Israel-Palestine peace may not be realistic right now. It is irresponsible for an administration to become overly involved in direct military conflict in the Middle East when the outcome is unpredictable—a stance often taken by Donald Trump. While the U.S. should not abandon larger goals in the long run, we should be putting our energy into efforts that will bring stability to the Middle East and improve the American image abroad now. Efforts in the near future should utilize soft power to influence nations and restricted military presence to prevent expansion of violence or nuclear weapons.

America Abroad. While pragmatic foreign policy requires greater levels of restraint and consideration than an all-out internationalism, the United States should continue to act on the international playing field and assert its role as a leader and as an ally. In the article “9/11 in Retrospect,” Melvyn Leffler discusses the decisions of the Bush administration to act unilaterally and how they affected America’s alliances and its international reputation (Leffler, 2011). Even prior to 9/11, Bush had begun a practice of disregard for American alliances and international agreements—for example, his quick withdrawal of the United States from the UN Kyoto Protocol (Kaufman, 2014). Now is the time for the United States to build on the reputation rebuilt by President Obama in the past eight years. When facing the challenge of the rising power of China, the United States must recognize the destruction that comes from strategizing and threat. The production of a national security strategy—in an attempt to display force and unite the public behind a perceived threat and therefore behind your policy—can lead to a security dilemma (Edelstein, 2015). Specifically in China, when the pivot to Asia was emphasized as a national priority, China reacted as if this was the beginning of containment, potentially creating a dangerous game of escalation. The next administration must pursue peaceful diplomacy in China building on foundations set by the Obama administration. As opposed to Clinton’s general alignment with Obama, Trump dangerously proposes increased military presence in China, which would surely create a security dilemma and spell success for forces of fragmentation. American dealings with China should strive to find agreement in shared interests when possible and accept the sure disagreements that will arise along the way. Learning from history and building on the integration of the world today, the U.S. must approach relations with China from a position of peaceful diplomacy, utilizing pragmatic politics to inform judgment.

FUTURE FOREIGN POLICY

While the goals of today to thwart fragmentation across domestic and international issues are broad, the goals of tomorrow will only continue to grow. The world has never been as connected as it is today, but it is implausible that complete integration will be a swift transformation. President Obama has set the stage for the next president to continue to foster the growth of acceptance domestically and interdependence internationally. Obama has regained much of America's reputation abroad through work such as trade agreements in China, climate change agreement in Paris, and patient decision-making in the Middle East. The next president should follow Obama's pragmatic approach to foreign policy and do more to better a strong American image at home and abroad. Looking at the assumed candidates in the 2016 race, it is clear that Clinton holds more of these values than Trump. Looking farther into the future, the world will lean towards integration, as that is the trend we see now. With the United States aware of its power but cautious of its involvement, the world should continue to see increased stability and interdependence.

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