

RESTORING AMERICA’S TRUST AND INFLUENCE ABROAD – FROM TALK TO ACTION

The Strengthening America’s Future Initiative Issue Paper

A Project of the
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Principal Project Supporter





Strengthening America's Future Initiative (SAFI)

Restoring America's Trust and Influence Abroad – From Talk to Action

Summary

As the President, Congress and the American people bring a focus to facing our current challenges, the country must accept the fact that the world, and America's position in it, has changed. The evolving nature of U.S. influence in a multi-polar world is a reality for which the President and Congress must plan and set a new strategic direction. Barack Obama's election and approach to the world—including his groundbreaking speeches in Cairo and Oslo, his willingness to engage in a new dialogue with America's friends and enemies, the effort to close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and his thorough deliberation before deploying additional American troops and resources to Afghanistan are transformative factors in changing the world's perception of the United States Presidency.

This President has an opportunity to create a new approach to global engagement, set a new post-Cold War national strategy, and change the way America creates security while interacting with the international community. It is up to this President to work with Congress to move America through this difficult period by articulating a clear American foreign policy vision and working hard to fulfill U.S. promises to the world; taking direct action to keep our fiscal house in order; and developing tools necessary inside government to project the U.S. vision and foreign policy. This includes allocating, in the most rational and effective manner, the resources necessary for communications, diplomacy, and development.

Introduction

I. A New Vision for U.S. Foreign Policy

- **Key Issues:** The President must articulate a clear and persuasive American foreign policy vision and work hard to ensure that the country keep its promises to the world. It is vital that the United States, and especially the American President, develop a reputation for fulfilling our country's promises—especially as the United States commits more resources to Afghanistan and deals with exploding debt to nations around the world. The most effective Presidents have been able to articulate a strategic narrative and consistent message while tying their words to promises kept and America's enduring values.
- **Recommendations:** This President can begin the process for moving the United States forward through two steps. First, he can create a "Strategic Narrative" for America's post-Cold War engagement. This is a tool for American leadership and its citizens to navigate an increasingly difficult international and national environment. And second, he can develop a reputation for fulfilling our country's promises—especially now that the United States is committing more troops and resources to Afghanistan and responsibly reducing the number of U.S. forces in Iraq.

II. America's Fiscal Challenge

- **Key Issues:** Today's problems—especially the fiscal challenges—require creating an extraordinary process for making decisions about America's fiscal future. Spiraling costs of the entitlement and tax programs are rapidly expanding the national debt and forcing the government to impose major tax burdens on younger workers to support a growing number of government programs.
- **Recommendations:** The President must inspire trust and maintain influence by creating a Fiscal Future Commission—an extraordinary process of government that can help put America's fiscal house in order. The President and Congress are balancing national priorities with the reality of climbing debt obligations and entitlement obligations. Just as President Eisenhower placed America's fiscal standing at the forefront of long-term competitiveness, this President and Congress must move beyond the current polarized political conversation to assure the nation's fiscal strength.

III. More than "Hammers"—Better Coordinating "Hard" and "Soft" Power

- **Key Issues:** As the United States operates in an increasingly difficult international environment, there is a need to coordinate the nation's tools of "hard" and "soft" power. America's strategic interests are not advanced by agencies that are stovepiped and by institutional and bureaucratic rivalries that impede America's attempts to align the joint efforts to the Departments of State and Defense.
- **Recommendations:** The President must create a cohesive National Security Strategy. This would include heeding Defense Secretary Robert Gates' call to engage the international community with more than just "hammers." A coordinated National Security Budget is needed to integrate Smart Power approaches that will help the United States allocate resources in a way that closely aligns the combined missions of the Department of State and the Department of Defense. As Secretary Gates has argued, funds that are now being used by the Department of Defense for communications and development are best served if they are moved to a stronger and more agile Department of State. Finally, our diplomatic professionals need an Innovations Fund to capitalize on the emerging information revolution. That means creating an independent Foundation for International Understanding that will support the use of media productions and interactive digital technologies to promote mutual understanding and engagement across borders, cultures, and religions.

Introduction

Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real, they are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this, America: They will be met. ... In reaffirming the greatness of our nation, we understand that greatness is never a given. It must be earned.

President Barack Obama, January 20, 2009

The world, and America's position in it, has changed. The evolving nature of U.S. influence in a multi-polar world is a reality the President and Congress must embrace. This is especially true as the nation is encouraged to design a long-term strategy to govern American leadership for the next several decades. A key success factor of this comprehensive strategy will be to Restore America's Trust and Influence Abroad—a core aspect of maintaining our leadership position in the community of nations.

As part of the Strengthening America's Future Initiative (SAFI), the Restoring America's Trust and Influence Abroad issue group (RATIA) was tasked with exploring how the nation can regain the trust of the world and strengthen the leadership position America has enjoyed over the past century. RATIA has been examining options and offering policy recommendations on how the United States can strengthen the country's leadership position, recapture the trust of the global community, and place America's position in the context of a long-term governing strategy.

Restoring America's Trust and Influence Abroad—A President and His Tools

The United States is moving through a difficult time with an extraordinary president. Barack Obama's election and approach to the world, including his groundbreaking speech in Cairo, willingness to engage in a new dialogue with America's friends and some enemies, and the effort to close Guantanamo Bay, have been a transformative factor in changing the world's perception of the United States Presidency—even if people are still questioning some U.S. policies around the world.

The polling site Transatlantic Trends puts it this way: "To Europeans, President Obama is certainly no George W. Bush. Support of the current American president jumped 80 percentage points in Germany, 77 points in France, 70 in Portugal, and 64 in Italy. No other single annual indicator changed this much in the eight years of Transatlantic Trends." Middle East attitudes toward the United States are slower to improve, but there is a marked uptick in polls throughout that region since the last administration.

It is in this environment—a well-liked president, but some skepticism over U.S. policies abroad—that the United States must navigate to improve its standing and influence in the world. David Abshire, CEO of the Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress, asserts that the trust and influence of the United States abroad starts with an influential president who is an effective communicator. Still, this alone is not enough. History tells us that inspiring trust and exerting influence in the world are the result of several interconnected factors:

- 1) That a President have the ability to articulate a clear American foreign policy vision and work hard to fulfill U.S. promises to the world.
- 2) That America must promote confidence by keeping our fiscal house in order.
- 3) That the President must develop tools necessary to project the U.S. vision and foreign policy. This includes allocating, in the most rational and effective manner, the resources necessary for communications, diplomacy, and development.

Using this framework, and in this spirit, the RATIA committee offers its recommendations as a part of the Strengthening America's Future Initiative. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton framed our challenge this way in a recent speech to the Council on Foreign Relations: "We must tackle the urgent, the important, and the long term all at once".

The President must articulate a clear and persuasive American foreign policy vision and work hard to ensure that the country keep its promises to the world.

According to presidential historian Richard Neustadt, the ability of a president to articulate a persuasive and clear message is essential to projecting American trust and inspiring influence in the world community. At the top of the list of presidential persuaders are Franklin Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan, and Abraham Lincoln. There are few better examples than Roosevelt's speech after Pearl Harbor ("a date which will live in infamy"); Reagan's speech at Brandenburg Gate ("Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!"); and Lincoln's speech at Gettysburg ("...we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground").

These speeches, and the best by other presidents over the years, have had the power to shape the moment, even as they articulate the larger strategic objectives of United States foreign and domestic policies. To this end, the RATIA committee believes that articulation of a clear American message is an essential element to restoring trust around the world and influence over events beyond our borders.

With his speech in Cairo in June, and with his other actions on the world stage, President Obama has made solid strides toward inspiring trust. With the President's decision made on Afghanistan and Pakistan, a continued drawdown in Iraq, and challenging situations in Iran and North Korea, it is crucial for President Obama to continue articulating a strong vision of American leadership and a clear message for how we are moving forward on these and other fronts.

A Presidency is more than words. The most effective presidents have been able to articulate a strategic narrative and consistent message—all while tying their words to promises kept. It is vital that the United States, and especially the American President, develop a reputation for fulfilling our country's promises. This reputation will be fostered—with both our allies and countries with which we have differences—through solid and consistent messages tied to actions aligned with our values.

The President must inspire trust and maintain influence by creating a Fiscal Future Commission—an extraordinary process that will help put America's fiscal house in order.

Another key element of trust, especially today, relates to the fiscal credibility of our government at home and abroad. Such credibility is strained today. This fiscal challenge, however, is not wholly new. America has found itself fiscally challenged at times since the earliest days of the Republic. George Washington's new government had no financial credibility in the world. The first American President sided with Alexander Hamilton in the assumption of state debt by the federal government and the creation of the First Bank of the United States. Washington knew then that even with his worldwide reputation for personal character, America would have been a crippled nation without such fiscal credibility.

The RATIA team believes that today's problems—especially our fiscal challenges—require creating an extraordinary process for making decisions about America's fiscal future. Spiraling costs of the entitlement and tax programs are rapidly expanding our national debt and forcing the government to impose major tax burdens on younger workers to support a growing number of government programs.

In light of the demonstrated inability of the existing political process to address these major structural problems, a promising alternative is the establishment of a Fiscal Future Commission, or FFC. This approach would be modeled, in part, on the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC), a bipartisan commission that develops a plan of action on military base closings that Congress ratifies in an up-or-down vote. Already, a significant bipartisan coalition on Capitol Hill has built widespread support for such a commission in the fiscal arena. Acting quickly would send a positive message to central bankers around the world that America is serious about its—and the world's—fiscal health. This confidence-building measure would encourage a new trust in the ability of the United States to lead and create a stable fiscal base on which our children and grandchildren can stand.

The President must create a cohesive National Security Strategy for the United States. This would include a coordinated National Security Budget and integrated Smart Power approaches, and resources allocated to more closely integrate the work of the Department of State and the Department of Defense.

In World War II, and then in the Cold War, Presidents became focused on the organization of government to accomplish the daunting goals of the time. Franklin Roosevelt reorganized the command structure of the Army, Navy, Air Forces along with Allied Forces with the goal of overcoming the institutional and bureaucratic rivalries and stovepipes that could impede the Allies' ability to defeat Germany. Harry Truman prepared a coordinated government to fight the Cold War by enacting the National Security Act of 1947. In the same way, President Obama and his team would be wise to consider rethinking the way that the U.S. national security apparatus is organized, the strategy by which the best of Smart Power and hard power are employed, and a new National Security Budgeting system designed to place the United States in a strong and influential position.

Joe Nye recently put it this way, "Diplomacy and foreign assistance are often underfunded and neglected, in part because of the difficulty of demonstrating their short-term impact on critical challenges. Many official instruments of soft or attractive power—public diplomacy, broadcasting, exchange programs, development assistance, disaster relief, military-to-military

contacts—are scattered around the government, and there is no overarching strategy or budget that even tries to integrate them.”ⁱ

The RATIA committee is offering several approaches to bringing more coherent and creative approaches for dealing with America’s national security challenges. These include creating a National Security Strategy and Budget; reallocating communications resources from the Department of Defense to a stronger communication apparatus at the Department of State; and launching a Foundation for International Understanding.

Develop a National Security Strategy and Budget

Presidents have learned over time that inspiring trust and influence requires that their team be primarily concerned with the organization of government. During World War II, Franklin Roosevelt, along with General George C. Marshall and Admiral William D. Leahy, had to organize command structures to bring harmony among the Army, Navy, and Air Forces branches, and Allied Forces. After the war, and in preparation for the Cold War, President Truman signed the National Security Act of 1947, which placed the Army and Navy under one Secretary of Defense, created the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and established a National Security Council in the White House. The Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 forced a new culture of jointness to the military, making joint command service a prerequisite to promotion.

The RATIA team believes that new challenges—among them globalization, the Iraq War and the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan—expose the need for a comprehensive review and overhaul of the U.S. national security structure. A coordinated strategy led by the National Security Council and integrating the State, Defense, Justice, Intelligence, and Homeland Security departments and the Director of National Intelligence is crucial. Additionally, the RATIA team agrees with Joseph Nye’s Smart Power Initiative when he described a national security budgeting process. This annual effort would place the National Security Advisor and the Office of Management and Budget director at the helm of this integrated process, so that the President is given the best fiscal advice from all of the relevant agencies.

A National Security Budget would help America move a long way toward the proper use of its military and diplomatic recourses in the securing the goal of Restoring America’s Trust and Influence Abroad. There would be several elements to this budget, including:

- Organizing a government-wide national security budget that helps decision makers and the President move beyond “the whims of individual agencies and or their leaders.”ⁱⁱ
- “Creating a Deputy National Security Advisor charged with developing and implementing such a strategy; and giving him or her the authority to work with the Office of Management and Budget to reallocate departmental funds to fit the strategy,” as offered by Nye and Richard Armitage in a Center for Strategic and International Studies report on Smart Power strategies.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Directing the National Security Advisor and OMB director to coordinate this process so that the President is given the best advice of all of the relevant agencies, including State, Defense, Justice, ODNI, Treasury and Homeland Security.

- Advocating for a structure in the House and Senate Budget committees that mirrors this process and stresses interagency coordination of budget development.
- Strengthening the government’s system of liaisons from the State Department, as a means of increasing America’s ability to coordinate its foreign policy efforts. This means placing State personnel in any agency in government with significant foreign policy activities and having this liaison report to both the administrators of that agency and senior officials at the Department of State.
- Asking Congress to provide a 10 percent additional allocation for the Department of State to be spent during the fiscal year on a discretionary basis. The rationale is to promote the development of new ideas and innovative solutions, and to maintain flexibility and adaptability to fund new ideas and solutions without seeking supplemental funding. This discretionary holdback would help ensure that people can be flexible, adapt quickly, surge in response to crisis, and create and implement new, innovative ideas.
- Developing a five-year budget on a whole-of-government strategy for national security. Before the next budget cycle, and in the next six months, we propose that the Administration create a five- to ten-year investment strategy for public diplomacy, traditional diplomatic efforts, development activities, and other forms of global engagement. Having the budget process led by leaders of the NSC and the OMB highlights the consensus view that this innovation will allow the government to take advantage of the interconnected nature of our strategic communications challenge.

Through these ideas, and others, RATIA seeks to help the Administration and Congress break out of a cycle of short-term thinking and move aggressively toward a long-term view of governing, communicating America’s message, diplomatic efforts, and development.

Move Funds for Communications and Development from the Department of Defense to a Stronger and More Agile Department of State

As much as any other institution in American government, the State Department is credited with “winning the Cold War.” This win brought a “peace dividend”—and State, like so much of the federal government, slimmed down to accommodate the decreased resource needs of a post-Soviet Union world. For the United States, the post-Soviet reality morphed into an even more complex environment for the world’s remaining superpower. This world includes stateless terrorism (al-Qaeda), protracted wars in the Middle East (Iraq) and South Asia (Afghanistan), a rise in globalized competition (the so-called fast-growing BRIC economies of Brazil, Russia, India, and China), and a growing list of new and evolving communications technologies. None of these realities were anticipated when the United States Information Agency was disbanded.

It is ironic that with new challenges demanding new forms of Smart Power, one of the biggest advocates for a stronger Department of State is the Secretary of Defense. For several years, Robert Gates has been sounding the alarm that more funds were needed to create a stronger Department of State. Appearing with Secretary Clinton, Gates recently said this:

“The American toolbox should contain something other than hammers. ... The question is, how do you build a constituency in the Congress over a period of time not only to grow the civilian national security part of our government, meaning the non-DOD part, but to provide the tools

that are necessary and that take years to build—in terms of talent and capacity—to be able to conduct America's relationships abroad?”

The RATIA committee recommends that Congress and the Administration begin to examine, and then act on, Secretary Gates' suggestion to reallocate funds for development and communications from the Department of Defense to the Department of State. Yet, it is not enough to just move these funds. The RATIA committee agrees with Secretary Gates that these additional resources must migrate to a more robust development and communications apparatuses at State.

Create a Foundation for International Understanding

The State Department and other agencies have too few options or tools that can be quickly and efficiently deployed in times of crisis. Further, the Department of Defense has a better developed ability to deploy funds to bring in private communications and development experts in times of crisis. In addition to long-term budgeting and strategic planning in national security and strategic communications, there is a need to create an Innovations Fund that will allow the Administration to be creative in real time and to fund initiatives that make sense for the Administration. This would allow the government to effectively adopt new technologies, bring in people, and capitalize on new ideas and events.

As part of this long-term effort, the government must collaborate with and support private institutions that can facilitate and expand global engagement. To advance this aim, the RATIA group proposes that the federal government support the launch and continued operation of an independent Foundation for International Understanding (FIU). This grant-making entity would support the use of media productions and interactive digital technologies to promote mutual understanding and engagement across borders, cultures, and religions.

Once launched, the FIU would be a key conduit for repositioning the United States around the world and creating an organic, interactive, and flexible communications infrastructure. The FIU could take advantage of the emerging global media market—characterized by audience expansion, media diversification, and growing demand for content (especially locally produced content)—by focusing on four objectives:

- **Supporting the full range of media and interactive tools:** The FIU would support initiatives using all types of media, from television and radio programs to new digital media formats such as educational video games, online virtual worlds, mobile content, and Web-based social networking. This approach would enable the FIU to reach diverse audiences, including segmented, difficult-to-reach audiences and those—especially young people—who favor digital media tools to engage and collaborate with peers.
- **Supporting people-to-people collaboration:** The FIU would support joint problem-solving across national boundaries through social networking sites, online immersive environments, broadband video conferencing, and other multi-user media formats. The FIU would also support projects that use interactive technologies to link classrooms and other learning environments for collaborative learning.
- **Supporting people-to-people interactive media:** The FIU would foster people-to-people dialogue and cooperation through a variety of interactive media, including

audience-participation radio and television, videoconferencing, and online virtual worlds. The FIU would also support distance education that links classrooms and other learning environments across borders.

- **Remaining flexible and responsive to new opportunities and challenges:** The FIU would remain flexible and responsive to new opportunities that arise in today's technology-driven media market and to events that raise new obstacles to tolerance and understanding. The FIU's review and grant award schedules would maintain a steady stream of media productions that advance the FIU's mission and allow timely response to changing conditions. The FIU would also continually solicit new ideas from media providers and other professionals in the field.^{iv}

As a public-private partnership, the FIU would use a combination of public and private funding to marshal talent and innovation from media providers, content developers, and social entrepreneurs around the world. The FIU would also be a resource multiplier, using matching grants and co-funding partnerships to leverage financial participation from corporations, foundations, and other donors worldwide

With annual funding of \$100 million to \$200 million, the FIU would be the culmination of a deep evaluation of U.S. public diplomacy and the growing role of the private sector in fostering engagement and collaboration in the digital age. The FIU is an elusive, specific solution to a systemic problem: how to utilize the best of the private sector and the new tools of the digital revolution to strengthen U.S. global engagement. Government support of the FIU would constitute a major step forward for the Administration and Congress, beyond the last decade of talk about reforming public diplomacy.

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