



INTRODUCTION: AMERICAN LEADERSHIP AMIDST COMPLEXITY AND CRISIS

By John Gallagher

Ultimately, global leadership requires us to see the world as it is, with all its danger and uncertainty, but [it] also requires us to see the world as it should be ... where the truths written into our founding documents can steer the currents of history in the direction of justice. (Barack Obama, 2014, West Point)

Our nation's cause has always been ... a peace that favors human liberty ... and we will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent ... When it comes to the common rights and needs of men and women, there is no clash of civilizations. (George W. Bush, 2002, West Point)

The US remains the nation the world turns to for leadership—to help make sense of crises, to strengthen alliances, and to serve as an architect for the way ahead in times of uncertainty. America seeks to bolster international order by assuring allies and deterring enemies through the application of its instruments of national power from diplomacy, military operations, and economic policy to humanitarian aid and development. However, America's level of engagement and expenditure in the world spanning the last two Administrations has proven unsustainable.

From a security standpoint, during just the past decade, the US has conducted combat operations coupled with a “surge” of tens of thousands of US troops in both Iraq and Afghanistan, invested tens of billions of dollars to build partner capacity of several host-nation militaries, announced a rebalance to the Asia-Pacific, and simultaneously reacted to the many challenges and opportunities of the “Arab Spring”—most notably the now global crisis emanating from Iraq and Syria. Combined with renewed competition from a revanchist Russia in Ukraine and elsewhere, increasing tensions with China in the South China Sea, and rampant cyber warfare, the US has little or no margin for error.

During this same period, the US has undergone a historic fiscal correction reflected in the 2008 financial crisis, the 2011 Budget

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Control Act, and enactment of Sequestration in March 2013. This downward pressure on the “means” of the ends-ways-and-means of strategy has made it harder for the US to proactively engage and diffuse crises before they occur, and to lead burden-sharing coalitions that do not recede as crises endure. Intended outcomes have been far more limited and much less durable than America’s robust efforts would suggest. Yet, amidst widespread global uncertainty and change, a strategic and moral imperative to lead remains.

Predictably, every National Security Strategy (NSS) from George W. Bush’s first in 2002 to Barack Obama’s last in 2015 asserts the importance of US leadership in the world:

- “These complex times have made clear the power and centrality of America’s indispensable leadership ...” (2015 NSS¹)
- “International order [is] advanced by U.S. leadership that promotes peace, security, and opportunity ...” (2010 NSS²)
- “America cannot know peace, security, and prosperity by retreating from the world. America must lead by deed as well as by example.” (2006 NSS³)
- “The United States possesses unprecedented—and unequalled—strength and influence in the world [which] comes with unparalleled responsibilities ...” (2002 NSS⁴)

The similarity in these excerpts seems to suggest there is continuity between Administrations regarding the US role in the world, which might therefore provide a sense of predictability for both allies and adversaries, regardless of who wins the White House.

In reality, as Stephen Sestanovich argues in *Maximalist: America in the World from Truman to Obama*, American engagement with the world tends to fluctuate between two types of Presidential leadership, *maximalism* and *retrenchment*. Sestanovich states (2014, 9):

Strategies of maximalism and retrenchment bear an obvious cyclical relationship to each other. Again and again, one has provided a corrective to the other’s

mistakes. When the maximalist overreaches, the retrencher comes in to pick up the pieces. Then when retrenchment fails to rebuild American power, meet new challenges, or compete effectively, the maximalist reappears, ready with ambitious formulas for doing so.

He rates Truman, Kennedy, and Reagan as maximalists, whereas Eisenhower, Nixon, and Carter are retrenchers. Bush 41 is, of course, a maximalist; Obama, a retrencher. While such characterizations cannot fully capture the complexity of presidential leadership, they do provide an interesting backdrop to this election year—when candidates’ “correctives” and “ambitious formulas” are mostly rhetoric, with real plans and policy undecided and untested.

Beyond this cyclical dimension of US leadership in the world, America has lost some clarity and therefore confidence in making sense of crises and setting a course for the way ahead. One very understandable reason for this, as noted, is the sheer number of crises globally. Partial, predatory governance is the norm in many regions, where citizens excluded from these partial social contracts become increasingly marginalized and persecuted, ultimately leading to instability. Another reason is the sheer complexity of crises today. Not only do they tend to be non-linear—where inputs do not yield intended outputs along anything resembling a straight, causal line—but one might even consider them to be *kaleidoscopic* in nature, where well-intended inputs often yield effects so unexpected that they are counterproductive (see Simpson 2012).

For example, despite massive financial, human, and political investment over 15 years, the US has achieved few lasting gains against the now-globalized threat from violent Islamist extremists. Analysts and policy-makers from both sides of the political aisle projected such groups would recede over time as their “bankrupt” ideology was rejected globally. Yet, the number of terror groups, geography and resources they control, resonance of their worldview, foreign supporters, and virtual followers have all increased. International agreements and counterterrorism efforts

integrating nations and multilateral institutions (including the UN and NATO) have had an insufficient impact on the growth of active groups and the associated death toll. In short, long-standing efforts to “disrupt and dismantle” terror networks have tended to overlook the importance of engaging and adroitly enabling the constructive religious actors and ideas uniquely suited to delegitimize and ultimately defeat them.

This special issue of *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* seeks to add to the candidates’ and ultimately the next President’s perspectives on some of the most complex global contexts that demand holistic, strategic approaches.⁵ The articles that follow demonstrate—and wrestle with—the interdependence of good governance, reconciliation, and stability anchored on religious freedom, rule of law, and equal citizenship in society. More broadly, this volume addresses the question relevant to all governments that seek to lead in a way that is legitimate and leaves a worthy legacy: How does a government provide security, justice, and human flourishing while allowing—even enabling—all of its citizens to fully embody their religious and cultural identities, and in doing so to contribute to society’s best present and future?

At a minimum, the answer requires governments and civil society to establish common cause across what might otherwise be divisive boundaries. It requires engagement between people of different ethnic backgrounds, nationalities, genders, and, in particular, different faiths—recognizing the transformative potential when the state recognizes its legitimacy extends from the natural rights of individuals-as-citizens. As Harvard’s Michael Sandel (1998, 66) states,

what makes a religious belief worthy of respect is not its mode of acquisition—whether by choice, revelation, persuasion, or habituation—but its place in a good life, or from a political point of view, its tendency to promote the habits of and dispositions that make good citizens.

In 2000, with keen awareness of emerging global challenges, Ambassador Robert Seiple and Margaret Ann Seiple founded the Institute for

Global Engagement, publisher of this journal. In his book *Ambassadors of Hope*, Ambassador Seiple (2004, 1) wrote, “we have entered a new global era ... one in which international conflicts and problems have ongoing repercussions at home and around the world.” And in 2002, only months after the attacks of 9/11, a group of 60 prominent US scholars and ethicists (including my own advisor at The University of Chicago, the late Jean Bethke Elshtain) published an open letter titled *What We’re Fighting For*, which affirmed “Five fundamental truths that pertain to all people without distinction”:

- All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.
 - The basic subject of society is the human person, and the legitimate role of government is to protect and help to foster the conditions for human flourishing.
 - Human beings naturally desire to seek the truth about life’s purpose and ultimate ends.
 - Freedom of conscience and religious freedom are inviolable rights of the human person.
 - Killing in the name of God is contrary to faith in God and is the greatest betrayal of the universality of religious faith.
- (Signatories 2002)

Even a cursory glance at the current global environment reveals the prescience of these ideas from nearly 15 years ago. Poor governance that isolates and persecutes some of its citizens, failing to treat them as “equal in dignity and rights” has consequences, and can create conditions conducive to anti-government—even anti-civilization—groups that kill in the name of God. The information revolution and subsequent diffusion of power away from states has given such groups unprecedented capacity for information-sharing, mobility within and across borders, transnational sources of funding, and the ability to weave local, regional, and global events into their ideological narratives nearly instantly. Such instability is not easily contained.

Whether through the current refugee crisis in the Middle East, the “migrant crisis” beyond the

region, or terrorist attacks in Paris, San Bernardino, and Brussels, the impact is increasingly global in scope. Regional powers as well as great powers outside the region are drawn toward the crisis on different sides, stoking existing rivalries and bringing them all closer to missteps or provocations that can lead to conventional conflict. In the millions displaced, hundreds of thousands killed and held captive for their beliefs and/or gender, and even more living in fear and want as the result of extremist violence, we are indeed seeing “ongoing repercussions at home and abroad.” These issues demand enlightened leadership and America’s engagement, as fundamental questions of human identity and worth are at stake.

Recent bi-partisan legislation (House Resolution 75, passed 393–0) denouncing violence against Christians, Yazidis, and other religious minorities in Iraq and Syria as “genocide” is a start. Additionally, I was privileged to attend the Marrakesh Declaration in Morocco in January, which brought together 250 religious leaders from Muslim communities around the world as well as 70 other experts and leaders to advance a “framework for the protection of minority rights” in Muslim-majority territories. This, too, is a good start. However, addressing such complex problems—particularly those with a prominent religious dimension—demands integration across government and civil society, domestic and international stakeholders, hard and soft power, as well as between religious affairs, secular political processes, and even technology platforms. Too often, these efforts remain segregated.

The January 2016 House Armed Services Committee testimony of Michael Morell (former acting director of the CIA), Michael Vickers (former Defense Undersecretary for Intelligence), and Robert Ford (former US Ambassador to Syria) is an example of the segregation that can persist between the policy sector and religious actors and institutions, despite shared interests. The hearing was titled “Combating ISIS,” and although the witnesses represented the US intelligence and diplomatic communities, much of the dialogue was about solutions that go far

beyond surveillance or drones. The experts referred repeatedly to the importance of countering the “idea” of ISIS, through reconciliation, in a sectarian and cultural context. Ford argued:

[T]o contain the Islamic State, there must be efforts at national reconciliation ... This is important because we don’t want the Islamic State to be put down militarily and then revive, as happened between 2011 and 2013. I really don’t want to see an Islamic State, version 2.0.

Despite the more holistic approach espoused by these security and policy experts, I am not aware of anyone from the hard-power sector who was present for the Marrakesh Declaration, for example, if only to observe and learn from the proceedings. Similarly, the countless security and policy dialogues taking place in agencies and think tanks all over Washington (and beyond) typically do not include the kind of religious leaders and cultural experts invited to Marrakesh. This lack of integration across sectors threatens to delay or even prevent durable progress on an urgent issue that is gradually destabilizing the globe.

Of course, problems related to governance, citizenship, and security abound beyond the Middle East and North Africa. In this special issue, whereas Chris Seiple addresses key issues of US engagement in the Middle East, Farahnaz Ispahani highlights women’s rights and extremism, and Turan Kayaoglu addresses Turkish governance and rights issues, our other expert contributors offer a diverse look at top priorities around the world, including Pakistan, Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Myanmar, and Laos), and Russia. Inevitably, the next US President will be presented with myriad challenges and opportunities in all of these nations and corresponding regions. America’s ability to lead will depend in no small part on our ability to understand and engage the critical factors of identity and religion in the process.

On this point, there is progress. In July 2013, the National Security Council issued the U.S. National Strategy for Religious Leader and Faith

Community Engagement. The strategy outlines the importance of religious leader engagement in American efforts abroad to counter extremism, provide humanitarian assistance, and protect the human rights of all marginalized and persecuted groups. Further, in February 2014, the White House held a Summit on Countering Violent Extremism that has since spawned a regional program housed at the State Department, executing similar summits in key regions around the world. In addition, as Judd Birdsall notes in this issue, the State Department has established both the Office of Religion and Global Affairs (which, in the past year alone, has grown from only two to nearly 30 people) and the position of Special Advisor for Religious Minorities in the Office of International Religious Freedom. Moreover, the debate lingering in the US interagency for the past several years over whether “religion matters” has given way to more productive discussions of *how* to best engage the religious dimension of policy, security, development, and diplomacy—to do good not harm, to know the appropriate limits of such engagement, and to even know when a problem with a religious dimension should not be viewed primarily through a religious lens.

Overall, sustainable US leadership requires the next President to undertake a careful review of

how the US prioritizes its interests, partners with traditional and non-traditional allies, and postures its diplomatic, defense, and development capabilities around the world. Scarce resources and overlapping sources of instability worldwide make informed, holistic US leadership arguably more important than ever. While the level of US engagement globally may fluctuate cyclically between Administrations, the next President has both an opportunity and obligation to build on the hard lessons of the past 15 years.

As the 2006 NSS notes,

The United States supports those who seek to exercise universal rights around the world ... recogniz[ing] that different cultures and traditions give life to these values in distinct ways. America's influence comes not from perfection, but from our striving to overcome our imperfections ... [which] is what makes the American story inspiring.

While uncertainty and turbulence in the global environment is a cause for concern, American leadership amidst complexity and crisis—at the nexus of faith and international affairs—can be a source of hope. ♦

Notes

1. Available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf.
2. Available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf.
3. Available at <http://georgewebush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2006/>.
4. Available at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf>.
5. This journal previously published a special “Recommendations for the Next President” during the 2008 election cycle—see <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rfia20/6/3>.

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