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on

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### **Amb. Dobbins:**

“Either you’re with us or you’re with the terrorists” that’s how George W. Bush divided humanity a few weeks after 9/11 in his address to the U.S. Congress. And at the time it made sense, because the world was with us. China, Russia had voted for a resolution endorsing the American attack on Afghanistan. Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Iran, all the countries that surrounded and had influence had offered to help. We could say with confidence that the world was with us.

It was a moment very like the moment in 1989 after Saddam Hussein had invaded Kuwait. There too we were able to gather an immense coalition. Syria provided troops that fought under American command. The Soviet Union voted for a resolution authorizing the United States to lead in the liberation of Kuwait.

Now, neither of these coalitions outlasted the wars for which they had been called together to fight, but throughout the 1990’s, American leadership did remain in demand. United States foreign policy remained quite popular. In fact, when they left office, George H. W. Bush and then Bill Clinton were both more popular abroad than they were in the United States.

By contrast if you look today five years after 9/11, the coalition that we were able to assemble has been almost entirely dissipated. American leadership in terms of its acceptability in the world at large is probably at a nadir. And the United States is probably more isolated than at any time in its modern history.

What went wrong? The easy answer is Iraq. If you invade a country by mistake, you have to expect a certain loss of faith in your prudence. And it’s true that the decision to intervene in Iraq on the basis of flawed intelligence and then the mismanagement of the occupation lost the United States a great deal of the respect and sympathy that it had spent 60 years in garnering. But it’s only true as far as it goes.

Well before the intervention in Iraq, American policy had turned down a road that few were likely to follow.

I see this story in 3 chapters: first Afghanistan, then Iraq, and then Lebanon.

Chapter 1 begins with brilliant success, not just the success of the conventional war. After all, for most of the past half century, Western armies have won nearly every conventional war quickly and, for the Western army, relatively bloodlessly.. So it wasn’t exactly remarkable that the United States was able to prevail over Afghanistan, particularly with the support of the entire world.

But what was surprising was the degree to which the United States was able, so rapidly, to replace the Taliban with a broadly based representative government with wide legitimacy in that country. Which raises the question ‘Why did things go so smoothly in Afghanistan in the post-conventional combat phase and so badly Iraq?’

I’d say that there were three reasons for the rapid transition in Afghanistan.

First- as I already noted, we had broad international support.

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Secondly, we went in with a modest set of objectives. The United States didn't invade Afghanistan with the stated intention of turning that country into a model for Central Asia, following which we intended to change the form of government of every one of its neighboring states. That wasn't our objective. Our objective was to ensure Afghanistan didn't again become a base for international terrorism, to achieve which we sought to install a broadly based government that would be a threat neither to its own citizens nor to its neighbors.

This was a proposition for which we could get support from those neighbors. This was the third difference between Afghanistan and Iraq. We did get the support of every one of Afghanistan's neighbors, not just in the war to overthrow the Taliban but in the process of replacing it with something better.

There's a popular perception in the United States that in the aftermath of 9/11, the United States formed a coalition and overthrew the Taliban. Wrong. In the aftermath of 9/11, the United States joined an existing coalition which had been trying to overthrow the Taliban for a decade. The coalition consisted of India, Russia, Iran and the Northern Alliance. And with the addition of American airpower, that coalition succeeded in overthrowing the Taliban. That's what happened.

Now in terms of post-conflict success in forming a government, that too was successful because of the broadly based coalition that came together for the political purposes of forming a new government in Afghanistan. As the American representative to the Afghan opposition, I represented the US at the Bonn conference that met for that purpose. The conference had representation from all of the major elements of the Afghan opposition and from all of the principal regional states—the countries that had been playing the great game and tearing Afghanistan apart for 20 years—Russia, India, Pakistan, Iran, and a few others.

At one point the U.N. had circulated the first draft of the Bonn declaration, which is essentially Afghanistan's interim constitution. It was the Iranian envoy who noted that there was no mention of democracy. "Maybe a document like this ought to mention democracy" he suggested. I allowed as how that was probably a good idea. I have to note that my instructions didn't say anything about democracy. We weren't on a democracy campaign at that stage. We wanted a government that would work with us to track down remaining al Qaeda elements and we sought to construct a broadly-based, representative government that could keep the country in peace.

It was also the Iranians delegation who proposed that the document should commit the Afghans to cooperate against international terrorism..

At one point, I reproached my Iranian colleague because his foreign minister had been quoted the day before as saying that he didn't think any peacekeeping troops were necessary for Kabul. I said to my Iranian colleague, "Well you and I have agreed that we really need a peacekeeping force in Kabul. Why is your foreign minister being quoted to the contrary?"

And he replied, "Jim, you can consider this a gesture of solidarity with Don Rumsfeld," who was known to be somewhat skeptical about the utility of peacekeeping. "After all Jim, you and I are both way out in front of our instructions on this one, aren't we?" Which was true.

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On the last night, we'd agreed on everything except who was going to govern Afghanistan. So we had a document, we had the interim constitution, but we were still arguing about who was going to govern Afghanistan. The Northern Alliance was insisting upon occupying 18 of the 24 ministries and everyone else agreed that was too many. It wasn't going to be broadly based if the Northern Alliance, which represented maybe 30 or 40% of the country, got 80% of the ministries.

And so at my suggestion, we got together all of the foreign ambassadors who were still awake—it was about 2 in the morning—which was a kind of self-selective process. If they were still awake, they cared a lot. And so it consisted of myself, the Iranian, the Russian, the Indian, and the German, the host, and Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN chair of the meeting. We worked over, for two hours, the Northern Alliance representative, each of us arguing, in turn, that he should agree to give up several Ministries. And this culminated finally in the Iranian representative taking him aside and whispering to him for a few moments, following which the Northern Alliance envoy returned to the table and said, “Okay, I give up. The other factions can have two more ministries.” Four hours later the German Chancellor arrived and the Bonn agreement was signed. And that was how the final breakthrough in the negotiation was achieved.

Iran had the most senior delegation to Karzai's inauguration. Their foreign minister came. There had been some doubt about whether Ismail Khan, a warlord in the area closest to Iran, was going to support this settlement. The Iranian foreign minister landed in Herat, picked Khan up, put him on the plane and brought him to Kabul just to make sure no one doubted that he was going to support the conclusion.

In the Tokyo donors conference that came a few weeks later, Iran pledged \$500 million worth of assistance to Afghanistan, assistance which by and large they've since delivered, which is a staggering amount for a non first-world country and was by far the largest of any of the non-OECD countries at the pledges.

Several weeks thereafter, the Iranians came to me at another multilateral meeting we were having about Afghanistan in Geneva, and said they were prepared to help rebuild the Afghan army and that they would do so under US leadership. They introduced me to the Iranian general who had been the commander of their security assistance efforts for the Northern Alliance throughout the war. And he said, “We're prepared to house, pay, clothe, arm and train up to 20,000 troops in a broader program under your leadership.”

So I said, “Well gee, if you train them and we train them, they'd end up having a different doctrine.”

The general just laughed and he said, “Don't worry, we're still using the manuals you left behind in 1979.”

So I said, “Okay, so maybe they might have compatible doctrines but they might have incompatible loyalties.”

And he said, “Well, we trained, we equipped, and, by the way, we're the ones who are still paying for the Afghan troops you're still using in the southern part of the country.. Are you having any difficulty with their loyalty?”

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So I said, “No, not as yet..” I said I’d go back and report that to Washington.

I did and there was no response and the offer was never taken up.

And this brings us to Chapter 2, which begins only a few weeks after the fall of Kabul and the installation of the Karzai government. It opens with the President’s State of the Union address in January 2002, in which he lumps Iran, Iraq and North Korea into the axis of evil. Now, that all three were evil is a defensible proposition. But that there was an axis between them is completely indefensible. Iran and Iraq were bitter enemies. It was a bit like suggesting that the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany should be treated equally after Germany had invaded the Soviet Union. Churchill, at that point, was criticized by someone for welcoming Stalin into the Grand Alliance. Churchill responded, “You know, If Hitler invaded hell, I’d make a favorable reference to the devil in the House of Commons.”

George Bush was apparently not prepared for that degree of moral ambivalence only a month after Iran had been quite helpful in the campaign in Afghanistan and its aftermath.

A few months later, the second shoe dropped with the issuance of the Administration’s National Security Strategy. It had a couple of key points, both of which were unnecessarily provocative. Analytically defensible but unnecessarily provocative.

One was the statement that the United States was never going to allow a peer competitor to emerge. That not only could nobody expect to be superior to the United States, we weren’t going to allow anybody be equal. And the second was the preemption doctrine.

Now the first assertion, that we weren’t going to allow any peer competitors to emerge, was as I said analytically defensible, but what was the point? There was never a time in our entire national history than a peer competitor had been more distant. There was never a period in our national history—over 225 years—where we had less risk of facing a peer competitor than in 2002. So what was the point?

And of course, pre-emption again was defensible as a last resort, as an option, but it’s very poor as a basis for declaratory policy. Of course the United States isn’t going to wait to get attacked. The United States has fought many wars in its history, but the only time prior to 9/11 that it was attacked first was in World War II. Just look at the last several decades. The United States went twice into Lebanon, it went into the Dominican Republic, it went into Grenada, went into Panama, went into Somalia, went into Haiti, went into Bosnia. Of those countries, how many of those had attacked the United States? How many had attacked anybody? None! They had all been civil wars and the United States had chosen to intervene.

So, stating that the United States wouldn’t wait to attack wasn’t exactly news. But making it a central part of your declaratory policy is just designed to antagonize the rest of the world. And that’s what it did, making it much more difficult to rally a coalition around the conflict in Iraq a year later because to do so would seem to be approving a principle of international conduct which the international community simply wasn’t prepared, as a matter of principle, to endorse.

The axis of evil and preemption ultimately led, and were used to justify the intervention in Iraq.

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Anyone examining the American occupation of that country could be forgiven for thinking this was the first time the United States had ever done anything like this. It was one unanticipated challenge after another, one improvised response after another.

In fact of course, this was the seventh time the United States had liberated a country and tried to reconstruct it in little more than a decade. We'd gone into Lebanon, then Somalia, then Haiti, then Bosnia, then Kosovo, then Afghanistan, and then Iraq in a little more than 10 years. And by the way, of those seven countries, six are Muslim. The only one of those countries that's not Muslim is Haiti.

So in 2003, when we went in to Iraq, there was no country in the world with more experience in nation building. There was no western army in the world with more experience operating in a Muslim society than the American army. So, one has to ask oneself, how could we do this so often, and yet do it so poorly? The answer has to do with the controversy which surrounded nation building in the 90's and a consequent refusal to learn lessons from those experiences. The result was what I call calculated ignorance, that is a calculated decision to exclude a body of knowledge or experience, which if applied would have yielded better results.

I'll give you two examples:

One was the decision to model the American occupation on Iraq on the occupations of Germany and Japan rather than the multilateral peace enforcement actions in Bosnia and Kosovo. This was an explicit element of the American rhetoric in the weeks before the invasion of Iraq. Now there would seem a couple of reasons why the American occupations of Germany and Japan might appeal to the Administration more than the peace enforcement actions in the former Yugoslavia as reference points for the upcoming reconstruction of Iraq.

First, Germany and Japan were unequivocal successes whereas the American led efforts in Bosnia and Kosovo were at best equivocal successes. But the big difference is that those successes had nothing to do with Bill Clinton and therefore they were politically safe. You could embrace them. It wasn't embarrassing to say, "We're going to do just like Douglas MacArthur did.", where it would have been embarrassing to say, "We're going to do just like Bill Clinton did, maybe a little better."

So there was a decision to think of this as an occupation. And of course we think of occupation in relatively benign terms. We think, Germans and Japanese, they didn't do too badly did they? The only occupation anybody in the Middle East has ever heard of, however, is the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. That's virtually the only occupation that's actually technically occurred since 1945 and it's naturally the one they refer to. So the very use of the term was bound to make it more controversial than it needed to be.

In retrospect, it would have made much more sense to apply the more recent and relevant lessons of the Balkans to Iraq than the more distant and less relevant ones of the post WWII occupations. Japan and Germany had been highly homogenous countries with first world economies. And they had both surrendered after extended and horrifically destructive wars. Iraq like Yugoslavia was made up of disparate ethnic and linguistic groups, some of which preferred not to live in the same state if they could avoid it. They were not first world economies, and they had not surrendered. So all in all, Iraq in 2003 looked a lot more like Yugoslavia in 1995 than Germany or Japan in 1945.

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The second example of this calculated ignorance was the decision to take all of the responsibilities for the non-military elements of nation-building—that is to say for holding elections, rebuilding the economy, building political parties, building a free press—take all those responsibilities from the agencies of government that had been doing them for 50 years, maybe not terribly well, but increasingly better in the 90's as they did more and more of it, and turn them all over to the Department of Defense which had no experience whatsoever in these various fields since 1952 when the German and Japanese occupation ended.

Now whether this was a good or bad idea in the abstract, doing this a few weeks before the war began meant imposed immense startup costs as thousands of dedicated and courageous young Americans went to take up positions in Iraq for which they had not the slightest preparation. It is amazing in retrospect that this exercise in heroic amateurism achieved as much as it did given the startup costs and difficulties in doing something so poorly prepared.

Chapter three opens in January, 2005, with the President's Second Inaugural address. Suddenly we find that stability is out and democratization is in. Peacemaking and mediation are out. Transformational diplomacy is in.

Now it's easy to see why, at that stage, the Administration would embrace democratization so firmly. It was after all, the last possible excuse for having invaded Iraq. Nevertheless, democratization offers poor basis for organizing our entire Middle Eastern diplomacy.

Secretary Rice is right to criticize previous American administrations for having given the Middle East a pass from American democratization efforts which had been broadly successful in Latin America, in East Asia, throughout Eastern Europe and even in parts of Africa. These policies should have been applied in the Middle East, and should be applied. Nevertheless you're not going to fix fifty years of neglect in two or three months or even in two or three years.

In the months that followed the Inaugural Address we've seen other changes in the administration's rhetoric. The enemies list has continued to grow. It has ceased to be just Al Qaeda and is now Islamic fascism. A terrorist criminal conspiracy has given way to a global jihadist insurgency. And the global war on terror has become the long war, which recently became the wide war, extending from Lebanon through Afghanistan.

Nearly five years after 9/11 American diplomacy had succeeded in isolating, not the terrorists, but the United States. How did this occur? I'd say there are three underlying difficulties in the way we explain ourselves to ourselves and to others.

First, we use highly polarizing rhetoric in describing the challenges we face. Second, we've had an excessive concentration on democratization as a one source fix for the problems of the region. And third, we tend to employ martial terminology and military analogies to describe what we're about.

In a search for moral clarity the Administration has tried to divide the Middle East into good guys and bad guys. America tends to treat Middle East diplomacy as a win/lose or zero-sum game in which Syrian, Iranian, Hezbollah or Hamas gains are by definition American losses and vice-versa. The result of course is the United States always loses, because if you insist that the population of the

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region choose between Syria, Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas, on the one hand, or the United States and Israel, on the other, they are going to choose the other side every time.

America and Israel are now so deeply unpopular in the region that the support of either is a liability for the other. The Israeli attack on Lebanon was certainly not going to be well-received in the Arab world, but it was probably even worse received when it got Washington's endorsement. Similarly American efforts to pursue the war on terror are resisted to the degree that they are perceived to advance Israeli interests.

I've mentioned the excessive concentration on democratization. We've discovered in the Middle East that democracy can mobilize populations, but it can't unite them. The results in Iraq, in Lebanon, in the Palestinian Authority have all been destabilizing. It's true that many people of the Middle East want democracy, but the fact is that they want other things more.

They don't see themselves primarily divided into radicals, democrats and conservatives. For most of them, whether they're Muslims, Jews or Christians, religion tends to be more important than ideology and nationalism tends to be more important than religion. Consequently, the divide between Muslim and non-Muslim regimes is seen by most populations in the region as more significant than the division between authoritarian and democratic.

And as the United States has discovered in Iraq, the divide between Shia and Sunni Muslims is wider than the difference between adherence of the old regime and supporters of a democratic alternative.

And finally throughout the region, the gulf between occupier and occupied is the most important distinction of all. The credibility of American democracy campaign in the region has not been helped by having its trial runs in what's perceived as occupied Iraq, occupied Afghanistan, and occupied Palestine. The fact is that we've given democracy a bad name by associating it with some enterprises that are, in the region, extremely controversial. As a result of this excessive emphasis on democratization the U.S. has managed to position itself on the wrong side of the two issues people in the region care much more about. One is the distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims and the other is between occupier and occupied.

Finally, there is our reliance upon martial terminology to describe what we are about in the world. If Al Qaeda has a historic antecedent that one can usefully point to, it's probably the anarchist movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. But that's really too obscure a reference point to help explain what's going on to most Americans. And so we've chosen a more familiar set of analogies, largely military ones: "We're in a war," "The enemy are Islamic fascists". "They are mounting a global insurgency".

These are somewhat useful analogies, but they're not fully accurate descriptions. There are certainly wars underway in Iraq and Afghanistan. But most of the terrorists we care about are in Pakistan, the United Kingdom, Germany, Saudi Arabia, not countries the United States is likely to invade. Bin Laden bears only the most remote resemblance to Benito Mussolini. Al Qaeda is not actually trying to take over the United States, or even Iraq. So the global war on terrorism isn't really a war, our enemy are not really fascists, and they're not really mounting a global insurgency.

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These labels do convey some important and useful information, but they also convey a good deal of misinformation. The main value in using hot, loaded terms such as these is their utility in mobilizing domestic opinion by constructing an easily assimilable and emotionally gripping narrative. The main disadvantage is that by employing such inexact terminology, it makes precise distinctions, insightful analysis and subtle policy much more difficult to achieve.

So what's the solution? I'd suggest it consists of trying to find a new narrative, a more sophisticated analytical framework and a more precise vocabulary for describing what's going on. Secondly, a somewhat greater discretion and sense of restraint in choosing our enemies. Thirdly, we need to craft our message for an external as well as an internal audience. And finally, we need a return to traditional as opposed to transformational diplomacy.

First, as regards the need for a new narrative, the 'war on terror' as a phrase, as a slogan, has clearly outlived its usefulness. Both the Department of Defense and the Department of State have asked the White House to stop using it. The White House has refused.

If we're in a war on terrorism, the central front isn't Iraq, it's Pakistan. The British terrorists who were going to blow up half a dozen planes flying across the Atlantic didn't fly to Iraq for inspiration and guidance. They flew to Pakistan. Pakistan backed the Taliban. Pakistan allied itself with Al Qaeda. Pakistan assisted the nuclear programs in Iran and North Korea. Bin Laden is in Pakistan, he's not in Iraq. And terrorists who are looking for guidance and inspiration are going to Pakistan, not to Iraq. They go to Iraq if they want to get killed. Therefore the central front's in Pakistan. But if Pakistan's the central front, it's not one that's susceptible to a military solution. We're not going to invade Pakistan. We're not going to bomb Islamabad. So there's no point in thinking of it as a war. Martial terminology is fine if we want U.S. troops to patrol the Afghan side of the Northwest frontier for another generation. But if we're going to do something about Pakistan, we're going to have to have a different term of reference because what we need to do there is pump hundreds of millions maybe billions of dollars into their educational system. That's the kind of solution that's needed if we're going to address the real problem.

Now I've already talked about a greater discretion in choosing our enemies. The problem with thinking of Al Qaeda as a global insurgency, which has some value as an intellectual construct, is that it tends to confuse this virtual insurgency that's being mounted by Al Qaeda and the actual insurgencies that are being mounted by nationally motivated Muslim groups in a dozen places around the world.

The people who are mounting these real insurgencies couldn't care less about a new caliphate. They're fighting to gain control of a territory, to secure autonomy or independence or some rights that they believe have been transgressed in one way or another, sometimes against Muslim governments, sometimes against non-Muslim governments. Their objectives are almost purely nationalist, not ideological in nature.

Al Qaeda of course is a parasite, that seeks to attach itself to these insurgencies in order to gain strength, to gain adherence, to gain credibility, and it will continue to do so. There isn't a single insurgency in the world involving Muslims in which Al Qaeda isn't going to pick sides and identify itself with one side or another.

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Now sometimes, this means that we need to pick the other side. But it doesn't always mean that. Sometimes the best way of dealing with nationalist Muslim insurgencies is to co-opt them, to support them. I mean, there isn't an insurgent in the world who wouldn't choose American support over Al Qaeda's support if he could get it.

Those were the strategies that we adopted in Bosnia, in Kosovo, and by the way fifteen years ago, in Afghanistan. That is, we supported the Muslim insurgents. We supported the Muslim insurgents in Bosnia despite the fact that Al Qaeda was already fighting on their side. We supported the KLA, the Kosovo Liberation Army, in Kosovo despite the fact that it was a terrorist organization and was conducting terrorist attacks. But we decided the other side was even worse, and the result of our support was that the more extreme elements of the insurgency immediately became marginalized, and largely irrelevant in terms of the politics of those societies. And of course that was the case in Afghanistan when the United States supported fundamentalist Muslim insurgency against a modernizing, in that case, Soviet-backed regime. And the United States would have continued to dominate and influence that society if we hadn't simply abandoned the country and left it to Pakistan and to Al Qaeda.

This is not to suggest that we should embrace every Muslim insurgency. But we do have to make sure that we don't wind up on the side of every Buddhist, every Hindu, every Jewish, every Christian and every Communist government that's fighting a Muslim insurgency just because Al Qaeda happens to have chosen the other side. We need to choose our enemies and our friends based on some broader criteria of national interest rather than simply allowing Al Qaeda to choose our alignment by virtue of its own.

Finally, we need more traditional and less transformational diplomacy. We need to work with our friends, we need to talk to our adversaries. We need to speak less about war and more about peace.

If there's one thing I've learned about from a decade of nation-building is that security is an absolute prerequisite for political and economic reform. This means that in places like Iraq or Lebanon or the Palestinian Authority, stabilization needs to precede democratization if the later is to bear beneficial results. This in turn requires of the United States an effort to mediate conflicting claims, balance competing forces, and tamp down sectarian passions. This has been the traditional American role but its one the current administration has largely abandoned. In Lebanon, the United States ceded its traditional role to others, most notably France. The result has been a cessation of hostilities on terms upon which large-scale fighting could probably have been averted in the first place, if the United States had chosen to exert itself at an earlier point.

On Iraq on the other hand, there's nobody to whom the United States can turn over the task of mediating the disputes. Nobody's going to step in like France in Lebanon and play that mediating role.

Like any failing state, Iraq can only be held together if its neighbors cooperate in the effort. You only have to think back to the experiences of Bosnia and Afghanistan to know this is true.

In 1995, the United States decided that it couldn't hold Bosnia together unless it engaged Milosevic and Tudjman -- the two men who were personally responsible for the genocide we were trying to stop -- bring them to the conference table, give them a privileged position and allow them to

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participate, both in a settlement and the implementation of a settlement. There was simply no other way.

In Afghanistan as I've noted, the United States decided it wasn't going to be able to install a broadly based representative government in Kabul that would hold unless it did so with the support of the very countries that had been tearing Afghanistan apart for 20 years, that is to say Russia, India, Iran, and Pakistan.

The United States' objectives in those cases were certainly morally clear enough, but its diplomacy was extremely pragmatic. The more unhelpful, the more objectionable, the more "evil" any regional actor might be, the more important it was to engage him, to bring him to the conference table, and to secure his cooperation in ending the civil war and rebuilding the shattered society.

There is not the slightest prospect of being able to hold Iraq together unless we engage in a similar effort to engage its neighboring states, no matter how objectionable we find their behavior. These neighbors simply have too much influence and too much at stake to be ignored or excluded from the process.

To conclude, what our diplomacy needs is a little more nuance and a little less certainty, a little more sophistication and a little less simplicity, a little more cooption and a little less coercion. It may be a bit difficult to sell a policy based on these principles to the American people. But such a policy is more likely to succeed. And in the end the American people are more likely to support policies that succeed than those that fail.

Thank you.