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Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University Northridge, Emeritus

Foreign Affairs recently featured a forum on "Obama's World: Judging His Foreign Policy Record." Gideon Rose, editor of the journal, started the discussion with an overall positive assessment of President Barack Obama's foreign policy through August 1, 2015 and the agreement with Iran on its nuclear program.[1] The Islamic State (ISSIL) seized Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq, in June 2014 and emerged as a serious threat in the Syrian civil war as well as in Iraq. As the title of the article, "What Obama Gets Right: Keep Calm and Carry the Liberal Order On," indicates, Rose favorably emphasizes Obama's "grasp of the big picture," his perspective as an "ideological liberal with a conservative temperament," and his determination to reverse the mistakes of the George W. Bush administration. The Bush Whitehouse, Rose suggests, made many mistakes in the first term, following policies that were "deeply flawed in both conception and execution" (2, 6). Rose concludes that Obama was "better at strategy than implementation" in his focus on preserving the core of the liberal world order by "downsizing the U.S. global role" and reducing the commitment of U.S. resources, particularly U.S. ground military forces, to peripheral areas (10, 7).

In response to Rose's essay, two foreign-policy columnists—Bret Stephens and Anne Applebaum—and five academic specialists provide their preliminary assessments of Obama's accomplishments and failures. Bret Stephens, columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*, offers the most direct rebuttal to Rose's article, as indicted in the title of his contribution, "What Obama Gets Wrong: No Retreat, No Surrender," with emphasis on Obama's 'failure' to deliver on his promises.[2] According to Stephens, Obama's "rebalance from the periphery to the core … has created power vacuums that have been filled by the likes of the self-declared Islamic State" (15). In "Obama and Europe: Missed Signals, Renewed Commitments," Anne Applebaum notes that Obama misinterpreted relations with Russia and its President, Vladimir Putin, and proposed a "reset" to improve relations, but had to respond to Putin's seizure of the Crimea and armed intervention into eastern Ukraine.[3] As opposed to criticism of Obama alone, Applebaum points that several of Obama's predecessors, most notably Presidents Jimmy Carter and George W. Bush, had similar experiences dealing with the Kremlin (44).

The other participants offer overviews of the Obama administration based on their areas of expertise, noting strengths and weaknesses in Obama's performance. Marc Lynch, for example, suggests that in the Middle East Obama had the right strategic vision to reduce the U.S. military presence and political investment in the area and in following a policy of "exercising restraint diplomatically, stepping back and challenging allies to

[1] Gideon Rose, "What Obama Gets Right: Keep Calm and Carry the Liberal Order On," *Foreign Affairs* 94.5 (September/October 2015): 2-12.

[2] Bret Stephens, "What Obama Gets Wrong: No Retreat, No Surrender," *Foreign Affairs* 94.5 (September/October 2015): 13-17.

[3] Anne Applebaum, "Obama and Europe: Missed Signals, Renewed Commitments," *Foreign Affairs* 94.5 (September/October 2015): 37-44.

take greater responsibility for their own security" (18).[4] Implementation of this vision, however, "often floundered," as the White House "failed to deliver on [its] … promises." Yet Lynch concludes that Obama got the "biggest issues shaping the region right" (18). For Asian specialist Thomas J. Christensen, China presented Obama with two major challenges: "how to deter the People's Republic from destabilizing East Asia and how to encourage it to contribute to multilateral global governance" (28).[5] After some early mistakes, such as "exaggerated language about a pivot" (29) to Asia and China, Obama had some success, according to Christensen, who points to Obama's in management of the difficult challenge of dealing with the rise of China, its aggressive activities in the East China and South China seas, and at the same time offering cooperation on areas of mutual interest in the economic relationship and mutual concern with respect to climate change (33-36).

The reviewers divide into two groups with respect to their responses to the issues raised by the articles. James Lebovic and Bruce Jentleson reflect more on the general issues raised on the challenges of engagement and disengagement, and Peter Feaver and Henry Nau direct more attention to offering a rebuttal to Gideon Rose's essay. They all raise the issue of continuity between Obama's and Bush's policies as in Jessica Stern's discussion on Obama's continuation of Bush's counterterrorism policies.[6] Lebovic, for example, notes mistakes made by Bush in being too aggressive, such as with Iraq, and by Obama by "doing less and acting with deliberation and restraint [that] will not necessarily produce better resolutions and can still result in costly and erratic policy investments with damaging long term consequences." Lebovic also commends the authors for recognizing the liabilities of over-commitment and underinvestment and develops this argument in terms of the Middle East with reference to the difficulties of achieving U.S. goals with respect to governments in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. In his review, Jentleson notes a "degree of inherent subjectivity grounded as [the esays] are in the authors' own intellectual and to an extent political priors" and finds the most value "when they get past the focus on U.S. policy and discuss the broader systemic, regional and related contexts in which the U.S. seeks to achieve its objectives."

In his lengthy rebuttal to Rose, Feaver points to the mixed assessments of Obama's record by many of the authors and responds in depth to Rose's criticism of Bush's record as a contrast to Obama, who inherited Bush's results. What Feaver emphasizes as the "dominant pattern in the Obama record" with some exceptions such as the war against Al Qaeda, relations with China, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, is "some success in the foreign policy area where he continued the policy lines he inherited in 2009 … [but] Obama did not enjoy success … where he diverged in both rhetoric and reality from the Bush policy lines." Feaver endorses the Stephens rebuttal to Rose's article and probes most of the articles along the lines of what Obama hoped to accomplish and what have been the results in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia. In conclusion Feaver admits that many of the issues with which "Obama has struggled proved troublesome for Bush as well." Henry Nau disagrees with Rose's assessment as well as with

[4] Marc Lynch, "Obama and the Middle East: Rightsizing the U.S. Role," *Foreign Affairs* 94.5 (September/October 2015): 18-27.

[5] Thomas J. Christensen, "Obama and Asia: Confronting the China Challenge," *Foreign Affairs* 94.5 (September/October 2015): 28-36.

[6] Jessica Stern, "Obama and Terrorism: Like It or Not, the War Goes On," *Foreign Affairs* 94.5 (September/October 2015): 62-70, 62.

most of the other authors except Stephens and Applebaum, and shifts the issue of core versus peripheral areas back to a World War II-Cold War ideological battle in which all areas needed to be defended such as Vietnam. Instead of George W. Bush as a successful contrast to Obama, Nau advances President Ronald Reagan's economic and foreign policies as the benchmark to be followed, writing that "The point is that Obama has accepted America's decline as an irreversible fact; Reagan did not. And, as Reagan's turnaround from the 1970s illustrates, decline is a choice, not a necessity." Nau rejects George W. Bush's "call to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture as "Pollyannaish." Instead, Nau calls for backing freedom in "countries on the borders of existing free countries."

Participants

Peter Feaver is a professor of political science and public policy at Duke University where he directs the Triangle Institute for Security Studies and the Program in American Grand Strategy. He has had two stints of public service in government, working as a Director of Defense Policy and Arms Control (while on an International Affairs Fellowship) on President Clinton's National Security Council staff in 1993-1994 and as Special Advisor for Strategic Planning and Institutional Reform on President Bush's NSC staff in 2005-2007. He thanks Luke Maier and Sabriyya Pate for research assistance in preparing this essay.

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James H. Lebovic is Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at the George Washington University. He has published widely on defense policy, deterrence strategy, military budgets and procurement, foreign aid, democracy and human rights, and international conflict. He is the author of five books including *Flawed Logics: Strategic Nuclear Arms Control from Truman to Obama* (Johns Hopkins University, 2013), *The Limits of US Military Capability: Lessons from Vietnam and Iraq* (Johns Hopkins University, 2010), and *Deterring International Terrorism and Rogue States: US National Security Policy after 9/11* (Routledge, 2007).

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Review by Peter Feaver, Duke University

Is the music of President Barack Obama's foreign policy better than it sounds? If you listen to senior Obama officials in moments of candor, the unraveling of America's geopolitical situation on Obama's watch sounds pretty bleak. Consider that Obama's Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, said in 2013 that the world is "more dangerous than it has ever been."[1] Or that Obama's Director for National Intelligence James Clapper said in 2014 that he had "not experienced a time when we've been beset by more crises and threats around the globe."[2] Or that Obama's Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel described the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) as "an imminent threat to every interest we have, whether it's in Iraq or anywhere else…beyond anything we've seen;"[3] and Obama's State Department managed to top that calling ISIL an "existential threat;"[4] and Obama's Attorney General managed to top even that, declaring that the configuration of terrorist groups in Syria was "more frightening than anything."[5] Or that Obama's own top diplomat for European affairs, Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland said that in a continent that was once becoming whole, free, and at peace, we now see that "Crimea and parts of eastern Ukraine are suffering a reign of terror."[6]

And let us not forget the parade of former Obama officials including such distinguished public servants as Obama's three former Secretaries of Defense, Robert Gates, Leon Panetta, and Chuck Hagel, former Under Secretary of Defense Michele Flournoy, former Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford, former senior White House staffer for the Middle East Dennis Ross, former top Pentagon intelligence and counterterrorism official

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[1] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, The Impacts of Sequestration and/or a Full-Year Continuing Resolution on the Department Of Defense: Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services, 113th Cong., 1st sess., 12 February 2013, https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-113shrg86707/html/CHRG-113shrg86707.htm.

[2] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, Current and Future Worldwide Threats to the National Security of the United States: Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services, 113th Cong., 2nd sess., 11 February 2014, http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/WWTA%20Opening%20Remarks%20as%20Delivered%20to%20SASC_11_Feb_2014.pdf.

[3] Chuck Hagel, "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Secretary Hagel and General Dempsey in the Pentagon Briefing Room," Department of Defense, 21 August 2014, http://www.defense.gov/News/News-Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/606917.

[4] "John Kerry: Daesh Biggest Threat, Not Russia." *Middle East Monitor*. 11 July 2015. https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/americas/19782-john-kerry-daesh-biggest-threat-to-us-not-russia

[5] Pierre Thomas, Mike Levine, Jack Date, and Jack Cloherty, "Latest Syria Threat 'More Frightening than Anything' Else, Holder Says," *ABC News*, 13 July 2014. http://abcnews.go.com/ThisWeek/latest-syria-threat-frightening-holder/story?id=24538221.

[6] U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Relations, Russia and Developments in Ukraine: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, Senate, 113th Cong., 2nd sess., 9 July 2014, http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2015/mar/238722.htm.

Michael Vickers, former top CIA official Michael Morrell, former top DIA leader Michael Flynn, and many more–all of whom have traced these problems in part to errors of commission or omission by President Obama and the rest of his national security and foreign policy team.[7]

Notwithstanding all of those dire assessments of the geopolitical situation at the end of Obama's tenure, can we nevertheless declare Obama's foreign policy music 'better than it sounds'–or at least better than President George W. Bush's sounded?

That, to borrow from Mark Twain, is the question at the heart of "Obama's World," a roundtable in the September/October 2015 edition of *Foreign Affairs. Foreign Affairs* editor Gideon Rose, himself a former junior staffer on President Bill Clinton's National Security Council, joins a diverse mix of scholars, pundits, and current/former policymakers to look at various aspects of Obama's record. They reach a correspondingly diverse set of judgments.

Those who maintain the music really is better than it sounds (and certainly better than how Bush's sounded) would include: Rose, who offers a summary big picture evaluation; Marc Lynch, focusing on the Middle East; Michael Reid, focusing on Latin America; and, of course, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, who focuses on his own defense portfolio.[8] Those who reach a more negative judgment include: Bret Stephens, whose article

[7] Dan de Luce, "Hagel: The White House Tried to 'Destroy' Me," *ForeignPolicy.com,* 18 December 2015, http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/12/18/hagel-the-white-house-tried-to-destroy-me/; Michèle Flournoy and Richard Fontaine, "To defeat the Islamic State, the U.S. will have to go big," *Washington Post*, 24 June 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/to-defeat-the-islamic-state-the-us-will-have-to-go-big/2015/06/24/fccb9f46-19e2-11e5-ab92-c75ae6ab94b5_story.html; Michael Flynn, Interview on *Hannity*, by Sean Hannity, Fox News, 16 November 2015, http://www.foxnews.com/transcript/2015/11/16/gen-flynn-gingrich-giuliani-and-carson-talk-isis-strategy-on-hannity/; Robert Ford, Interview on *Newshour*, by Margaret Warner, PBS, 3 June 2014, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/syrias-moderate-opposition-needs-help-ground-says-former-ambassador/; Robert Gates, Interview on *Special Report*, by Bret Baier, Fox News, 15 October 2015, http://video.foxnews.com/v/4560917813001/gates-on-why-obama-could-never-sell-the-war-in-afghanistan/?#sp=show-clips; Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "How Obama's Former Advisers Feel about His Strategy against the Islamic State," *Washington Post*, 23 November 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/11/23/how-obamas-former-advisers-feel-about-his-strategy-against-the-islamic-state/; Michael Morrell, Interview on *Face the Nation*, CBS News, 15 November 2015, http://www.cbsnews.com/news/former-cia-official-crystal-clear-obamas-isis-strategy-not-working/; Leon Panetta, Interview on *Meet the Press*, by Chuck Todd, NBC News, 22 November 2015, http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/former-defense-secretary-leon-panetta-isis-fight-u-s-has-n467801; Denis Ross, "How Obama Created a Mideast Vacuum," *Politico*, 10 January 2016, http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/01/obama-mideast-vacuum-213513#ixzz3wyFqYzOt; Michael Vickers, "Former Obama Terrorism Adviser: Change Your Strategy, Mr. President," *Politico*, 20 November 2015, http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/11/obama-isis-strategy-afghanistan-war-213380#ixzz3xNETl2pf.

[8] Gideon Rose, "What Obama Gets Right: Keep Calm and Carry the Liberal Order On," *Foreign Affairs* 94.5 (September/October 2015): 2-12; Marc Lynch, "Obama and the Middle East: Rightsizing the U.S. Role," *Foreign Affairs* 94.5 (September/October 2015): 18-27; Michael Reid, "Obama and Latin America: ,A Promising Day in the Neighborhood," *Foreign Affairs* 94.5 (September/October 2015): 45-53; Ashton Carter, "The Scholar as Secretary: A Conversation with Ashton Carter," Interview by Jonathan Tepperman, *Foreign Affairs* 94.5 (September/October 2015): 72-78.

matches Rose's with a wide-angle perspective; Nicolas van de Walle, focusing on Africa; Anne Applebaum, focusing on Europe; Thomas Christenson, focusing on Asia; and Jessica Stern, focusing on the war on terror.[9]

All of the judgments involve caveats, more or less. The critics identify some praiseworthy items in the Obama record whilst even the most ardent boosters concede that the record was not quite perfect. Moreover, sometimes the summary judgment comes off as begrudging. Van de Walle's article clearly is sympathetic to the Obama administration and expresses some reluctance about crediting Bush's overall Africa policy, arguing that it was primarily the exceptional increase in foreign aid that made the Bush record a net positive in the region–a judgment that downplays the reforms of the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the then-successful peacemaking efforts in South Sudan. Similarly, Stern credits Obama with wanting to make positive steps in the war on terror, even while acknowledging that there is far more continuity than change between Obama's policies and the Bush-era policies that Obama's team regularly denounces loudly but continues quietly. All of the reflections include the caveat, explicit or implicit, that of course the judgment is in some ways premature. Obama's record is not yet fully written and the long-term consequences will not be known for some time.

Despite these caveats, Rose's assessment is remarkably bullish. To Rose, Obama is a successful foreign policy president, on his own terms and especially compared to the Bush record which Rose roundly denounces. Rose argues that we should evaluate Obama as we would evaluate a relief pitcher: given the game situation he inherited, how well did he protect leads and recover from bad situations before handing off to his eventual reliever? That is indeed a fine standard, as is Ronald Reagan's more famous standard of evaluating whether the United States is are better off today than it was when the president took office.

Rose uses the right standard, but he applies it in an unpersuasive way. He accurately notes some of the geopolitical situation Obama inherited: a global recession, an Afghan war on a sharply negative trajectory, friction in the U.S.-Russian relationship, North Korea assembling a small nuclear arsenal, Iran likewise assembling thousands of centrifuges in preparation for its own nuclear breakout, and, above all, a global elite that had formed a decidedly negative opinion of President Bush that could not be shaken. But Rose does not adequately credit other crucial aspects of reality circa January 2009: the Bush team had already created the G-20 and taken the most difficult steps to stop the financial crisis from spiraling even further out of control (the rescue of the automobile sector and the Troubled Asset Recovery Program); against substantial political opposition from Democrats, Bush had ordered the successful surge in Iraq that reversed the trajectory in the war and largely defeated Al Qaeda in Iraq, neutralizing the political pressure of the anti-war movement and leaving Obama with choice rather than necessity in developing future Iraq relations; Bush had created the multilateral negotiating frameworks for addressing the North Korean and Iranian nuclear programs that Obama subsequently relied upon; Bush had deepened effective strategic cooperation with the United States' Asian allies and, after a rocky start, was similarly well-positioned with great power partners in Old Europe and rising power partners in New Europe; Bush bequeathed Obama a strategic framework with India in which the

[9] Bret Stephens, "What Obama Gets Wrong: No Retreat, No Surrender," *Foreign Affairs* 94.5 (September/October 2015): 13-17; Nicholas van de Walle, "Obama and Africa: Lots of Hope, Not Much Change," *Foreign Affairs* 94.5 (September/October 2015): 54-61; Anne Applebaum, "Obama and Europe: Missed Signals, Renewed Commitments," *Foreign Affairs* 94.5 (September/October 2015): 37-44; Thomas J. Christensen, "Obama and Asia: Confronting the China Challenge," *Foreign Affairs* 94.5 (September/October 2015): 28-36; Jessica Stern, "Obama and Terrorism: Like It or Not, the War Goes On," *Foreign Affairs* 94.5 (September/October 2015): 62-70.

hardest U.S. decisions had been already made; and, on and on. One could even add that, though he did not intend to, Bush had helped produce comfortable Democratic majorities in the House and Senate so that Obama's party enjoyed the strongest institutional control of government of any party in decades.

To be sure, some of these policies were themselves fixes to mistakes or reversals suffered by the Bush team earlier. But the important fact that Rose and all other Obama boosters fail to acknowledge is that Obama replaced the Bush of January 2009, not the Bush of 2002, 2003, or even 2006. And, even more important, on foreign policy and national security, Obama had a much freer hand than he is likely to bequeath to his successor. Yes, he faced an urgent decision to reinforce U.S. efforts in Afghanistan–something that President Bush offered to do on Obama's behalf during the transition to save Obama even that modest amount of political pain–but this was simply fulfilling a campaign promise to win the 'good war.' Given Obama's dominance of his own party and the broad support from Republicans, it was the easiest of the national security campaign promises for Obama to check off. On this and on most other foreign policy and national security issues Obama was in the zone of choice, not necessity—and he was choosing from a position of domestic power advantage that his predecessor surely did not have at the outset and his successor probably will not have.

Somehow Rose's article does not portray what is the dominant pattern in the Obama record. With a few important exceptions noted below, President Obama enjoyed some success in the foreign policy areas where he continued the policy lines he inherited in 2009 (even if he pretended otherwise in scorched-earth rhetoric against his predecessor). Where Obama did not enjoy success was where he diverged in both rhetoric and reality from the Bush policy lines.[10]

Examples of the former include the war against Al Qaeda up to and including the Abbottabad raid that killed Osama Bin Laden, and the effort to welcome China as a responsible stakeholder while also hedging against that by deepening U.S. ties to traditional allies and pursuing the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement (in a more expanded fashion than Bush originally proposed, to be sure). Obama's team tweaked the rhetoric of these policy lines–talking about man-made disasters instead of terrorism or rolling out a package of Bush-era policies under the new label of a 'pivot to Asia'–but at the level of policy the continuity eclipsed the change. Yes, he ramped up certain aspects of the kinetic aspect of the war on terror, specifically drone strikes and ordering the delayed Afghan surge, but this is better thought of as deepening an existing policy line rather than abruptly changing course.

Examples of the latter include the failed effort to pursue a G-2 condominium with China; the failed 'reset' with Russia; the failed effort to hold Israel-Palestine negotiations hostage to a 'freeze' in new housing on the West Bank; the failed effort to link the Afghan surge to a fixed withdrawal timetable not dictated by facts on the ground; the (so-far) failed effort to close the detainee facility at Guantanamo Bay; the failed effort to promote stability in the Middle East and mobilize better behavior from Iraqis by withdrawing completely

[10] Peter Feaver, "Giving Obama Credit–When He's Followed Bush's Footsteps," *Shadow Government,* 31 October 2011, http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/31/giving-obama-credit-when-hes-followed-bushs-footsteps/. Also see, Peter Feaver, "Iranian Containment: Refocusing the Argument," *Shadow Government*, 15 February 2012, http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/02/15/iranian-containment-refocusing-the-argument/.

from Iraq in 2011; the failed effort to incentivize better Iraqi behavior by withholding anti-ISIL assistance until after Mosul fell; and so on.

Even some cases where the policy line eventually produced something the Administration would claim is a major success–the Iran nuclear deal–it came in a fashion that fits the larger pattern. The aspects of the approach to Iran that worked were the unilateral and multilateral sanctions *followed* by diplomatic outreach, an approach pursued by Bush but which the Obama team strongly resisted for its first two years. The aspect of the approach that clearly failed was Obama's novel idea of unconditional outreach to the Ahmadinejad regime in advance of establishing stronger leverage in the form of tougher sanctions. Reasonable people can differ on whether the deal eventually struck in July 2015 involved too many concessions by the United States–concessions on the speed with which sanctions were relaxed, on the duration of the nuclear restrictions, on the degree of transparency about past nuclear operations, on the restrictions on Iran's other destabilizing activities, to name just a few. Reasonable people may also credit Obama's claim that the deal they struck with Iran was the best deal the Obama team was able to strike in July 2015, given all of the tactical diplomatic choices Obama had made in the previous six years. What is harder to credit is Obama's further claim that following a shrewder diplomatic strategy over the previous six years–i.e. listening to his critics–would not have put the United States in a more favorable bargaining position to achieve a better deal.

Another instructive way to evaluate Obama's record that Rose's article misses is to compare the situation today with what the Obama team was boasting about during the reelection campaign. During the reelection campaign, President Obama and his surrogates were boasting about how the war on terror had reached a culmination point–they even flirted with declaring strategic success against Al Qaeda heading into the final fall campaign;[11] they mocked Governor George Romney for identifying Russia as a top geopolitical adversary;[12] they bragged about how Obama had succeeded in withdrawing all U.S. forces from Iraq;[13] they praised themselves for announcing the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan and denied that this announcement undercut the effectiveness of the Afghan surge;[14] they heralded the Libya intervention as a

[11] Barak Obama, "Remarks by President Obama in Address to the Nation from Afghanistan," Office of the Press Secretary, White House, 1 May 2012, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/01/remarks-president-obama-address-nation-afghanistan.

[12] Barak Obama, "Remarks by the President and Governor Romney in the Third Presidential Debate," Office of the Press Secretary, White House, 23 October 2012, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/10/23/remarks-president-and-governor-romney-third-presidential-debate.

[13] Josh Rogin, "Obama no longer saying al Qaeda is 'on its heels,'" *Foreign Policy*, 17 October 2012, http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/10/17/obama-no-longer-saying-al-qaeda-is-on-its-heels/. Also see, Barak Obama, "Remarks by the President and First Lady on the End of the War in Iraq," Office of the Press Secretary, White House, 14 December 2011, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/12/14/remarks-president-and-first-lady-end-war-iraq.

[14] Mark Landler and Helene Cooper, "Obama will speed pullout from war in Afghanistan," *New York Times*, 22 June 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/23/world/asia/23prexy.html?_r=0. Also, see Obama Administration officials' testimony at: U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, The Situation in Afghanistan, Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services, 111th Cong., 2nd sess., 15-16 June 2010, https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-111shrg64545/html/CHRG-111shrg64545.htm.

"recipe for success" and a "model intervention," something Secretary of State Hillary Clinton later called "smart power at its best:"[15] and they flirted with a debate over whether to claim that they were on the verge of defeating the entirety of Al Qaeda or just "core" Al Qaeda.[16] Subsequent events exposed every one of those boasts as hollow–every one of those policy lines is inarguably in worse shape today than it was in 2012 and arguably in worse than it was in 2009.

Rose's article misses all of these crucial facts and instead praises what he considers to be Obama's big strategic bet: that the way to save the liberal global order was through American retrenchment. But Rose fails to analyze the logic behind that strategic bet. Obama's big strategic bet on retrenchment is better seen as the combination of several other strategic bets: (i) that the way to get other actors to do more is to convince them that the United States is committed to doing less; (ii) that allies in Asia will believe U.S. strategic assurances to them and not be undone by its failure to back up redlines or the perception of American retreat in other theaters like the Middle East; (iii) that the U.S. gets better cooperation by being tougher on its allies and more accommodating to its adversaries; (iv) that geopolitical disruption resulting from American inaction is much preferable to geopolitical disruption resulting from American action. Those and other assumptions form the microfoundational logic of the Obama approach and, I would argue, they have been tried and found wanting over the past seven years.[17]

Moreover, Rose's article unwittingly provides an even more damning rebuttal of Obama's strategic bet when, in closing, Rose notes that, as bad as the U.S. geopolitical situation might be, it is still much better than that of any other ally or adversary. Rose presents this point as a rebuttal Obama's critics–as in, you cannot paint Obama's record negatively if you see how much worse off everyone else is. Set aside the fact that we now know that this net assessment was even truer in 2009. What Rose's article does not address is the fact that this fact means that the defeats on Obama's watch were defeats of choice, not of necessity. The strongest and best critique of Obama is not that world events have forced America into retreat–rather, it is that Obama has played a relatively strong hand relatively poorly.

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[15] Jim Kuhnhenn, "Obama to Leno: Libya a "Recipe for Success," *Associated Press*, 26 October 2011, http://www.boston.com/ae/tv/articles/2011/10/26/obama_to_leno_libya_a_recipe_for_success/; Ivo Daalder and James Stavridis, "NATO's Victory in Libya," *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2012); Hillary Clinton, "CNN Democratic Debate Full Transcript," CNN, October 13, 2015, http://cnnpressroom.blogs.cnn.com/2015/10/13/cnn-democratic-debate-full-transcript/.

[16] Stephen Hayes, "Mis-judging Al Qaeda," *The Weekly Standard*, 19 August 2013, http://www.weeklystandard.com/misjudging-al-qaeda/article/745840; Michael Flynn, "Flynn's Last Interview: Iconoclast Departs DIA with a Warning," Interview for Breaking Defense, by James Kitfield, 7 August 2014, http://breakingdefense.com/2014/08/flynns-last-interview-intel-iconoclast-departs-dia-with-a-warning/; Fred Lucas, "Obama Has Touted Al Qaeda's Demise 32 Times since Benghazi Attack," CNSNews.com, 1 November 2012, http://cnsnews.com/news/article/obama-touts-al-qaeda-s-demise-32-times-benghazi-attack-0; Bruce Hoffman, Mary Habeck, Aaron Zelin, and Matthew Levitt, "Is al-Qaeda Central Still Relevant?," Policywatch Lecture Series, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 10 September 2012. http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/is-al-qaeda-central-still-relevant.

[17] See also Hal Brands' related critique of the Obama Administration's flirtation with "offshore balancing," in Hal Brands, "Fools Rush Out: The Flawed Logic of Offshore Balancing," *Washington Quarterly* (Summer 2015), 1-28.

Does this mean that Obama will end his term without anything in the success column? Of course not. After a first term with little to show on the issue, the President has made progress on the global climate change agenda. The 2015 deal on carbon emissions with China, while hardly a panacea, is certainly a step forward, as is the late 2015 Paris Agreement. Obama also deserves credit for reaching a tentative deal on the TransPacific Partnership (TPP), although this may not culminate in eventual success because he reached it so late in his term due to footdragging as a concession to his own leftwing political base–not to mention adding provisions to the agreement that diminished its chances of Congressional approval. And, of course, Bin Laden was brought to justice on Obama's watch.

But on balance, as Bret Stephens argues convincingly in his contribution to the symposium, President Obama must take responsibility for the fact that he will be leaving to his successor a far more disordered world than the one he inherited–and this despite the fact that Obama inherited the worst economic recession since the Great Depression. Stephens is especially effective at pointing out the internal contradictions that afflict the pro-Obama case: "Obama's supporters also need to acknowledge that they cannot celebrate the president's supposed successes at one point and then disavow responsibility later when those successes turn to dust" (13). Stephens quotes chapter and verse on how partisan boosters do just that on the war against Al Qaeda and the withdrawal from Iraq. Obama, Stephens seems to be arguing, can be credited for being a consequential foreign policy president but the consequences are not very good.

The contrast between Rose and Stephens's articles is instructive, but I believe it misses what is the most important summary point to make about President Obama's legacy. On domestic policy, Obama has sought to be transformational (and to a great extent succeeded) through action, particularly government action. He vastly expanded the scope of U.S. governmental involvement in public affairs, and when he was unable to get Congress to go along with his ambitions, he wielded unilateral executive power in ways that few previous Presidents could. On foreign policy, Obama has similarly sought to be transformational, but with a few key exceptions (notably, the Paris Accord on climate change) the change has not been through action but through inaction. Even where there was diplomatic action–the outreach to authoritarian regimes in Myanmar, Cuba, and Iran–it has come by way of a retreat from previous bipartisan negotiating positions.

Obama came to power clearly believing that his predecessor had gotten into trouble by wielding American power in the pursuit of ambitious ends. In doing so, Bush may have been following in a long American tradition of Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Cold War presidents and, quintessentially, Reagan, to name a few–all presidents who thought you could hurry along history by wielding American power. In Obama's view, such an approach had come a cropper in Iraq. American action led to disaster, so Obama picked a different path (but one also with an American precedent): inaction and retrenchment. In this theory of geopolitics, American power could not hurry along history; history was a product–a prisoner?–of international structural forces that constrained the range of choice. Viewed favorably, this stance might be seen as similar to that of Dwight Eisenhower (whom Democrats decried for inactivity and losing ground to the Soviets) or George H.W. Bush (whom Democrats decried for lacking courage and vision); viewed less favorably, Obama might be seen as next in the line of the presidents of the interwar years when American leaders were similarly scarred by a war memory: Presidents Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover. Obama has been their natural heir, and his foreign policy legacy may well prove to be reviving public awareness that American power can yield disastrous results through inaction as much as through action.

To be fair, Obama has wrapped the reality of retrenchment and retreat within a rhetoric of soaring ambition: the Cairo speech, the global nuclear zero, the ending of wars, even the hyperbolic descriptions of what he accomplished with the Iranian nuclear deal–descriptions that are eerily reminiscent of Neville Chamberlain's 1938 boast of achieving 'peace in our time.' Obama is certainly not the rhetorical heir of Harding, Coolidge, or Hoover. But as Obama himself has admitted in a more candid moment, this rhetoric has reduced in practice to a doctrine of trying not to do "stupid [stuff]."[18] Tragically, as America learned in earlier times, one can end up producing stupid stuff by action or by inaction.

Of course, Syria is exhibit A in all of this (on which more below). Syria is where the Obama gap–the gap between rhetoric and reality, between American power and on-the-ground results, between what could have been and what actually is–yawns most vividly and tragically. But a case could be made that Syria is only one tiny scene in a much larger geopolitical picture. Obama became president at a time of extraordinary international fluidity–a potential change moment in global affairs, akin to what John Ikenberry has called an "ordering" moment.[19] Aside from some grandiose rhetoric, especially in the first year, did Obama achieve any of that? Hasn't he produced less ordering and more retrenching–at a ratio that even exceeds that of President Richard Nixon, who faced a far more daunting geopolitical landscape? In terms of consolidating power in the executive, Obama certainly rivals Nixon; in terms of adapting to and shaping the geopolitical order, Obama rivals Hoover. Obama campaigned on the promise to restore American values and interests around the world, but heading into his final year, they are more in retreat than they were when he arrived.

Like a fractal, these assessments are visible both at the overall level evaluated by Rose and Stephens and also when one drills down to look at specific issue areas. Marc Lynch is a thoughtful observer of Middle East politics and so even his ever-so-gentle criticisms of Obama have merit. He notes that Obama has promised much but delivered little, been ineffective at explaining his policies to the publics in the Middle East, and been slow to adapt and learn from early policy failures. Yet Lynch nevertheless argues that overall Obama has been more right than wrong on the Middle East, particularly at the level of big strategic judgments.

For instance, Lynch asserts, without providing much supporting analysis, that nothing Obama could have done differently would have extended the impact of the achievements of the Iraq surge. His article does not address the laundry list of mistakes and missteps in Obama's handling of the Iraq file,[20] blithely dismissing every Obama choice as inevitable and/or inconsequential. The article likewise fails to recognize that the same problematic Iraqi leader, Prime Minister Maliki, behaved in markedly different ways depending on how U.S. leaders treated him.[21] Lynch even goes so far as to argue that Obama was prescient. By abandoning Iraq in 2011, Obama kept U.S. forces out of harm's way when ISIL blazed its path of destruction in 2014: according

[18] Mark Landler, "Obama Warns U.S. Faces Diffuse Terrorism Threats," *New York Times*, 28 May 2014.

[19] G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[20] See Peter Feaver, "The Myth of Obama's Perfect Record in Iraq," *Shadow Government,* 22 October 2012, http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/10/22/the-myth-of-obamas-perfect-record-in-iraq/.

[21] See the discussion of how Maliki's behavior changed Peter Feaver, "The Hinges of a Successful Strategy to Defeat ISIL," in *Blind Spot: America's Response to Radicalism in the Middle East,* edited by Nicholas Burns and Jonathon Price (Washington, DC: Aspen Institute, 2015).

to Lynch, "had Obama not withdrawn U.S. troops when he did, the fall of Mosul would almost certainly have led to the reintroduction of tens of thousands of U.S. soldiers to refight the same futile war in defense of the same failed state" (19). This odd conclusion is based on a sidestepping of the awkward fact that Obama reintroduced thousands of U.S. troops in late 2014 in defense of Iraq and by ignoring how earlier U.S. action could have helped Iraqi forces prevent the fall of Mosul. Indeed, Lynch does not address the most awkward fact of all: the U.S. deployment that Obama defended as necessary and prudent in 2014 was precisely the deal that Obama dismissed as unnecessary and reckless in 2011—a few thousand U.S. troops with only the immunity protections of an exchange of diplomatic notes.[22]

If nothing else, Lynch's article shows a noteworthy flexibility in advocacy by simultaneously praising Obama for saving lives by intervening in Libya despite the chaos that ensued while absolving him for any lives lost through not intervening in Syria and despite the chaos that ensued. Lynch praises Obama for resisting the slippery slope of U.S. involvement in Syria, but of course Obama has been on the slippery slope ever since he said Assad must go.[23] Since 2011, Obama has eventually done much of what the critics have called for, but not before trying everything else first and waiting until problems have metastasized into something far worse.[24] Here Lynch's article follows too closely the modus operandi of official Obama spokespeople: claim that it is wise not to act; then when the United States belatedly does act claim that earlier action would not have reduced the now much-larger problem; if belated action fails to yield positive fruit claim that this proves Obama was right all along to resist action.

The publication cut-off date (shortly after the Iran deal closed) can probably be blamed for the article's superficial gloss on one manifest strategic failure related to the nuclear deal: Obama's failure to embed the nuclear deal in a larger strategy to counter Iranian destabilizing behavior in the region. The record of the last six months is clear: Obama has bent over backwards not to confront Iran on any matter lest it upset the nuclear deal, thus belying Lynch's claim that "the idea that the United States will realign itself with Tehran is a fiction invented mostly by the critics on the right" (21). The balance sheet may be lop-sided, but it is not without some token wins—Iran responded to the additional concessions by releasing a few long-held hostages (as well as seizing others and then releasing them to great fanfare, and, on the other hand, not stopping militias they support in Iraq from seizing yet more American hostages). And there is some token pressure–the Administration instated some modest sanctions related to Iran's missile proliferation efforts. Dogged supporters can still hold out hope that the Administration remains committed to checking Iranian adventurism so the deal will eventually prove a net positive. But it is doubtful that the next president, Republican or Democrat, will be as concessionary towards the regime in Tehran as Obama has been.

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[22] Peter Feaver and Mitchell Reiss, "What Happened to Immunity for U.S. Troops in Iraq," *Shadow Government*, 19 November 2014. http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/11/19/what-happened-to-immunity-for-u-s-troops-in-iraq/.

[23] Barak Obama, "Statement by President Obama on the Situation in Syria," Office of the Press Secretary, White House, August 18, 2011, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/08/18/statement-president-obama-situation-syria.

[24] Richard Fontaine shows that President Obama has been wrong-footed by this slippery slope fallacy throughout his tenure. See, Richard Fontaine, "Obama's 'Slippery Slope' Delusion," *Politico*, 14 January 2016, http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/01/obama-state-of-the-union-islamic-state-213531#ixzz3xJvRJGVJ.

Michael Reid's article presents a rosy assessment of Obama's record in Latin America, a feat only slightly less arduous than Lynch's effort to reach that same conclusion in the Middle East. As Reid's article acknowledges, "…the Obama administration took a largely reactive approach to Latin America that resulted in multiple fumbles" (45). But Reid's article argues for grading Obama on a curve skewed to account for the inevitable decline in U.S. influence. According to Reid, "…the United States arguably has less influence now in Latin America than at any point in the past century…" but claims this should not be blamed on (credited to?) Obama. On Obama's signature issue, the unconditional restoration of diplomatic ties with Cuba, Reid argues that the results will be positive but concedes that it is too soon to see much evidence to support that prediction. And Reid's article fails to inquire whether the Obama Administration perhaps made too many unilateral concessions to the Castro regime without securing any meaningful steps from Cuba in return. The latter could have included genuine progress on human rights (beyond just a revolving door of political prisoner releases and re-arrests), an end to Cuba's covert weapons shipments to North Korea, or the expulsion of Chinese and Russian intelligence assets that Havana willingly hosts.

Secretary Ashton Carter's self-assessment rounds out the case for an optimistic judgment on Obama's record. The interview conducted by *Foreign Affairs* managing editor Jonathan Tepperman reveals the qualities that enabled Carter to win strong bipartisan support at the outset of his tenure and so far to keep it. Carter manages a *tour d'horizon* without making concessions that would get him in trouble with the rest of the Obama team or making outrageous claims that would get him in trouble with the facts. He is most persuasive and authentic in talking about two of the biggest challenges he faces: pleading for an end to sequester and forging the military partnerships that will lead to a more stable Asia. This is an interviewwith a sitting policymaker, not an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of a record.

From there, the symposium contributions edge into the negative-assessment territory. Nicholas van de Walle's review of Obama's Africa record gives Obama the benefit of the doubt, but still concludes that "…Obama's policy toward Africa has been something of a disappointment" (54). Van de Walle hastens to add that every U.S. president has disappointed on Africa, although he does acknowledge President Bush's game-changing public health development policies. He credits Obama with being the first "post-foreign-aid president" when it comes to Africa, noting Obama's reliance on the private sector (including private foundations) in advancing development goals in the area (60). Still, since it is hard to find many examples of democracies or conflict zones that are in better condition in 2015 than they were in 2009, van de Walle rightfully concludes that there has been little progress on the political-military front in the continent on Obama's watch.

Space constraints prevent me from giving the other three pieces the attention they deserve. Jessica Stern provides a fair-minded assessment, and her conclusion is persuasive even though it was written before the game-changing events of the ISIL-directed attack in Paris and the ISIL-inspired attack in San Bernardino: "If nothing else, one lesson the next president should learn from the Obama years is to resist the temptation to change counterterrorism policy solely for the sake of change, or to help differentiate him- or herself from the previous occupant in the White House. In the fight against terrorism, as Obama discovered, Washington's room to maneuver is constrained by the dynamics of terrorist violence, the persistent appeal of extremist ideas, and the limits of state power in confronting the complex social and political movements such ideas foster" (70). Stern's analysis leads ineluctably to the conclusion that despite Obama's best efforts to be the anti-Bush, he mostly continued the Bush counter-terror policies he inherited. This is not necessarily a critique, since those policies may well be the best of the alternatives that were available, but it means that we

cannot credit Obama as transformational in this area. And it also means we are still in the middle years of the long twilight struggle against terrorism.

Thomas Christensen's evaluation is stark: "At the end of President George W. Bush's second term, the U.S.-Chinese relationship was heading in the right direction on both fronts. Under President Barack Obama, significant progress has been made on some issues, but the U.S.-Chinese security relationship and the Asia-Pacific region in general are far tenser today than they were at the start of 2009" (28). He hastens to add that this adverse development cannot be blamed entirely on Obama; "China's actions bear much of the blame" (28). Indeed, Christensen's article credits Obama with doing well under challenging circumstances. But–and this is the crucial point for this symposium–Christensen does *not* credit Obama with developing a whole new strategic insight about the relative importance of regions and a whole new set of Asia policies to reflect that insight–a claim that forms the basis of Rose's favorable assessment. Christensen's article deftly rebuts this myth, and instead shows that what was good about Obama's Asia policies was mostly a continuation of lines inherited from Bush, and what was bad was mostly the new over-hawkish rhetoric about Obama's materially under-resourced 'pivot.' If one considers developments since Christensen published his piece–for instance the bungled U.S. naval show of force in the South China Sea[25]—the case might be even less favorable to Obama.

Anne Applebaum limns the rapid descent of President Obama's Europe/Russia policy from the soaring expectations of candidate Obama's rapturous Berlin speech in 2008 down to the grubby realities of the redrawing of Europe's borders by force and the perilous condition of Europe's unification project in the face of a crisis of refugees fleeing the chaos wrought on Obama's watch in the Middle East. Applebaum blames some of Obama's missteps on naiveté, but concludes, rightly in my opinion, that since the reset was initially popular among our NATO allies, the blame should be shared. She contrasts how Moscow used the reset to rearm whilst Washington used the reset to retrench, with the result that in 2014 Obama was repeatedly wrong-footed by a more risk-acceptant Putin. The conclusion is starkly negative: because of choices Obama made in Europe, the United States and its allies face a graver geopolitical threat than they have faced since the Cold War, and they are less-well situated to meet that threat now than at any time since the Cold War.

Of course, identifying where Obama has struggled does not settle the comparative assessment of whether he has done better than Bush. Boosters claim that Obama's decision to abandon Iraq with all its attendant consequences is not as serious a strategic blunder as Bush's decision to invade Iraq. Such claims are ubiquitous; harder to find are serious assessments that rigorously compare the actual range of choice, the actual range of what was known or knowable, and the other counter-factual questions on which that conclusion rests. In any case, such a careful comparison is beyond the scope of a symposium entitled "Obama's World."

Moreover, many of the issue areas where Obama has struggled proved troublesome for Bush as well. Obviously, even if one credits Bush for turning around the Iraq war (which the Obama supporters in the symposium seem reluctant to do) his overall record in the Middle East was equivocal, as is Obama's. Perhaps Bush's problems arose from how he started wars, while Obama's arose from how he has tried to end them.

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[25] Jeff Smith, "An Innocent Mistake," *Foreign Affairs*, 3 December 2015, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2015-12-03/innocent-mistake. Also, see: Demetri Sevastopulo and Geoff Dyer, "US Navy operations send muddled message to China," *Financial Times*, 7 November 2015, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/8762e906-853c-11e5-9f8c-a8d619fa707c.html#axzz3xpFGldsP.

Obama has failed to make progress on North Korea, but Bush did not make more progress on that hard case either. Bush was unable to stop Putin's adventurism in Georgia; Obama has been unable to stop Putin's adventurism in Ukraine. Bush was unable to stop the genocide in Darfur; Obama has been unable to stop the slow collapse of South Sudan.

And, it must be emphasized, no president should be blamed for policies that the United States' adversaries pursue. At most, presidents can be blamed for not taking steps that were clearly doable that might have thwarted the adversaries. Likewise, there are doubtless issue areas where any president would have struggled, so the fact that Obama was over-matched may in some cases say more about certain daunting challenge than about Obama (or another president's) deficiencies.

This brief review does not leave enough space to deal with all of the other issues that must be weighed in the balance before determining whether Obama is a net positive or net negative foreign policy President. An incomplete laundry list of items to consider would include: Obama's role in creating the defense budget-busting sequester; the outreach to Myanmar; the limited success at forging of an action-oriented partnership with Gulf States to push back against both ISIL and Iranian efforts to destabilize the region; slow-tracking trade negotiations to avoid antagonizing the left; expending very little political capital to mobilize public support for the wars he inherited in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the wars he launched or renewed in Libya, Iraq, and now Syria; tolerating a dysfunctional interagency process that politicizes national security and strains norms of civil-military relations; to name just a few.

I suspect that in the coming years, rose-colored assessments of Obama's record will be even harder to defend persuasively. During the 2016 campaign season, of course Republicans will be painstaking in pointing out the faults. Perhaps less obviously, likely so too will the Democratic nominee even if there is no upset and President Obama's former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is the standard bearer. By November, Clinton is likely to ground her case for passing the commander-in-chief threshold test more on the issues where she disagreed with Obama than on the ones where she agreed. Moreover, as the unvarnished warnings of a parade of Obama former officials make clear, these are dangerous times. It is true that the United States may prove to be stronger than the problems it are facing, as has been true for the past 240 years. But that does not exonerate Obama from responsibility for the consequences of his actions and inactions. The next president will indeed inherit "Obama's World"–as much as any world can be assigned to a single leader. He or she may well find that a tougher hand to play than "Bush's World" was for Obama.

Review by Bruce W. Jentleson, Duke University, and Kluge Center, Library of Congress

It is the season for end-of-presidency Obama foreign policy assessments. *Foreign Affairs* got a jump on things with its "Obama's World: Judging His Foreign Policy Record" forum in its September/October 2015 edition. There will be many more such assessments and prescriptions from think tanks, election year commissions, scholars, journalists, bloggers and the like. Along with reviewing this set of articles, it is useful to think about broad criteria and parameters to keep in mind when producing or consuming comparable studies.

The nine articles in the "Obama's World" forum are of three types: overarching assessments (Gideon Rose, Bret Stephens); issue-area specific (Marc Lynch on the Middle East, Thomas Christensen on China-Asia, Anne Applebaum on Russia-Europe, Michael Reid on Latin America, Nicolas van de Walle on Africa, Jessica Stern on terrorism); and "The Scholar as Secretary," an interview with Defense Secretary Ashton Carter.

Rose, who is the editor of *Foreign Affairs*, gives Obama a largely positive net assessment: he will "likely pass on to his successor an overall foreign policy agenda and national power position in better shape than when he entered office".[1] He credits the Obama administration for being committed to and making incremental improvements in the long-term enterprise of the liberal international order. And, unlike the Bush administration, which "lost its head" in invading Iraq, Obama's administration has avoided doing stupid "stuff" (there was a spicier word reportedly used by White House aides and perhaps the President himself). As far as Rose is concerned, while Obama has made some mistakes, much of what the critics say is, "to use a technical term, hogwash" (11).

Bret Stephens, a *Wall Street Journal* foreign policy columnist, sees things rather differently: bluster (Syria chemical weapons redline), enemies more emboldened (Iran, Russia), friends more embattled (Israel, Ukraine), incompetent execution even when objectives sound (Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, ISIS).[2] He grants a few credits (opening with Burma begun in the first Obama administration, Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiated in 2015, some aspects of drone use as part of counterterrorism strategy across various theaters), but overall lambasts the administration for overall "drift" (14) and a "cramped" conception of U.S. power (16).

As to the issue-area articles, Lynch on the Middle East provides the most favorable assessment, supporting the effort to "rightsize" the U.S. role in the region.[3] The Iran nuclear nonproliferation agreement is described as "a textbook example of a successfully conceived and implemented foreign policy" (20). Lynch argues that the Administration did put the U.S. on the right side of history in the Arab Spring, although with some inconsistency (Bahrain) and flaws in how they went about trying to achieve their objectives (Egypt). Limited involvement in Syria has been at least the least bad of options. Drawing the red line over chemical weapons

[1] Gideon Rose, "What Obama Gets Right: Keep Calm and Carry the Liberal Order On," *Foreign Affairs,* 94:5 (September/October 2015): 2-12, 2.

[2] Bret Stephens, "What Obama Gets Wrong: No Retreat, No Surrender," *Foreign Affairs* 94:5 (September/October 2015): 13-17.

[3] Marc Lynch, "Obama and the Middle East: Rightsizing the U.S. Role," *Foreign Affairs* 94:5 (September/October 2015): 18-27, 18, 27.

use was a mistake, but given the situation in August-September 2013, it was, according to Lynch, better to walk away than not. Trying for an Israeli-Palestinian peace was the right thing to do, but the administration "failed to deliver" (19).

Applebaum's article on Europe-Russia is at the other end of the evaluative spectrum.[4] Applebaum argues that the reset with Russia, while not totally ill-conceived, was taken too far even at the time (backing off missile defense for Eastern Europe) and stuck with for too long, manifesting a "complacency" (40) on the shifts in Russian policy once Vladimir Putin resumed the presidency of Russia in 2012. She also faults the Bush administration and the Europeans, but the best she can say about the Obama policy is a damning with faint praise that it was not "motivated entirely by naiveté" (39).

Christensen contends that relations with China and overall East Asia strategy are in worse shape than the Bush administration left them.[5] The heralded 'pivot' was already in the works, so too the Trans-Pacific Partnership economic agreement. Some credit, according to Christensen, is warranted for taking these further, but the change is not as great as has been advertised. Here too credit is given for the opening with Burma as well as for various aspects of regional multilateral diplomacy and for collaboration with China on climate change, which Christensen describes as a "major bright spot" (35).

Van de Walle is pretty tough on Obama's Africa policy, which he describes as "lots of hope, not much change" in the article subtitle.[6] Given Obama's personal heritage of a Kenyan father and his reflective explorations of his roots made famous in his book, *Dreams from My Father*[7], as well as the general orientation of his foreign policy, van de Walle notes that expectations among Africans may have been higher than other parts of the world. But policy remained under-resourced in aid levels, even in terms of embassy staffing. Programs like Power Africa, providing affordable electricity across much of the continent, have been more impressive in their rollouts than actual achievements. Diplomacy on Sudan and South Sudan has been decidedly mixed. Counter-terrorism has more and more eclipsed economic development and political governance as priorities.

Stern assesses Obama's counter-terrorism policy as "a step in the right direction."[8] She credits the Obama administration for avoiding some of the most egregious practices of the Bush administration, but overall it's been more continuity than change. He did eliminate Osama bin Laden, but has the 2.0 of ISIS/ISIL as well as signs of al Qaeda re-strengthening, plus all the offshoot-affiliated-inspired groups and individuals. She has

[4] Anne Applebaum, "Obama and Europe: Missed Signals, Renewed Commitments," *Foreign Affairs,* 94:5, (September/October 2015): 37-44.

[5] Thomas J. Christensen, "Obama and Asia: Confronting the China Challenge," *Foreign Affairs,* 94:5, (September/October 2015): 28-36.

[6] Nicholas van de Walle, "Obama and Africa: Lots of Hope, Not Much Change," *Foreign Affairs,* 94:5, (September/October 2015): 54-61.

[7] Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father* (New York: Times Books, 1995)

[8] Jessica Stern, "Obama and Terrorism: Like It or Not, the War Goes On," *Foreign Affairs,* 94:5, (September/October 2015): 62-70, 70.

mixed views of the use of drones, the CVE (Countering Violent Extremism) strategy, and other elements. While critical of Bush's war in Iraq, she also disagrees with Obama's withdrawal.

Reid sees the Cuba initiative as a major achievement in two respects: ending a vestigial Cold War issue and in positively affecting overall U.S. relations in Latin America.[9] He usefully reminds us of the Administration's bad start in the region in its uncertain and shifting response to the 2009 Honduran coup, although he does attribute this in significant part to Senate Republicans, who prevented the Obama administration from being as tough as it was inclined to be. Relations with Brazil have been mixed, as has Mexico policy. Overall, according to Reid, the Obama legacy is "promising" (53).

While useful, these assessments come with the caveat of a degree of inherent subjectivity grounded as they are in the authors' own intellectual and to an extent political priors. It is hardly a surprise that Stephens and Applebaum, their neoconservative identities well established in their columns, are as critical as they are. Christensen is a distinguished scholar from whom I have learned much about China, but having served in the Bush administration he does have some stake in saying that he and colleagues left policy in good shape. Rose is an intellectually committed realist from which paradigm deduces much of what he supports and what he does not. Lynch has not served in the Obama administration but is among the Middle East experts frequently called on for ideas. As an Africanist scholar van de Walle has a natural preference for greater priority for the region.

As someone who served in the Obama administration (2009-11, State Department) and in other capacities for Democratic administrations and officials, readers may feel some of my own work warrants similar asterisks. So I do not in any way imply intellectual dishonesty on the part of the authors. Indeed priors are an issue even within more strictly scholarly-academic work whether among political scientists vying in the general theory battle of the –isms, or historians deciding which documents from often massive archives to emphasize.

Where I find the articles most valuable is when they get past the focus on U.S. policy and discuss the broader systemic, regional and related contexts in which the U.S. seeks to achieve its objectives. "Obama's record must be viewed in the context of dramatic changes in Latin America" Reid writes, "which have inevitably reduced the United States' influence" (46). And Stern: the "room to maneuver" for any U.S. counter-terrorism policy "is constrained by the dynamics of terrorist violence, the persistent appeal of extremist ideas, and the limits of state power in confronting the complex social and political movements such ideas "(70).

We could use more work along these lines that gets at the nature of the twenty-first century world in which the United States pursues its foreign policy. What are the principal dynamics driving and defining the twenty-first century international system? What should America's role be beyond standard invocations of 'leadership'? What are the scope and limits of American power? An effective foreign policy requires answers to these questions that blend the conceptual and the substantive as a working strategic framework going forward.

[9] Michael Reid, "Obama and Latin America: A Promising Day in the Neighborhood," *Foreign Affairs,* 94:5, (September/October 2015): 45-53.

A final word on the interview with Defense Secretary Carter.[10] While the interviewer tried to pose questions that would draw him out, the transcript does not really get much past the standard fare. The missed opportunity is in not focusing more on the ostensible title of "scholar as secretary" and what insights he has for more synergy and connectedness between the academic and policy worlds, the kind of bridging the gap that can have tremendous value both for policy and for universities.

Where I find the articles most valuable is when they get past the focus on US policy and discuss the broader systemic, regional and related contexts in which the US seeks to achieve its objectives. Reid—"Obama's record must be viewed in the context of dramatic changes in Latin America which have inevitably reduced the United States' influence" (46)–and Stern—the "room to maneuver" for any US counter-terrorism policy "is constrained by the dynamics of terrorist violence, the persistent appeal of extremist ideas, and the limits of state power in confronting the complex social and political movements such ideas." (70)–do this particularly well.

We could use more work along these lines that gets at the nature of the 21st century world in which the United States pursues its foreign policy. What are the principal dynamics driving and defining the 21st century international system? What should America's role be beyond standard invocations of "leadership"? What are the scope and limits of American power? An effective foreign policy requires answers to these questions that blend the conceptual and the substantive as a working strategic framework going forward.

A final word on the interview with Defense Secretary Carter. While the interviewer tried to pose questions that would draw him out, the transcript does not really get much past the standard fare. The missed opportunity is in not focusing more on the ostensible title of "scholar as secretary" and what insights he has for more synergy and connectedness between the academic and policy worlds, the kind of bridging the gap that can have tremendous value both for policy and for universities.

[10] Jonathan Tepperman, "The Scholar as Secretary: A Conversation with Ashton Carter," *Foreign Affairs,* 94:5, (September/October 2015): 72-78

Review by James H. Lebovic, The George Washington University

Barack Obama reaped at least some benefits from following George W. Bush into office. In his first year as President, Obama won the Nobel Committee's prestigious peace prize on the promise that he was not George Bush. The committee meant the award as a down payment, in global good will, that would draw the new President away from the Bush administration's policy of 'shoot first, ask questions later.' The Bush administration had "cast its net too wide, taking on too many tasks of too great difficulty with too much haste, too few resources, and too little deliberation," in the too-kind words of Gideon Rose.[1] The Obama administration repaid its predecessor by establishing that U.S. global challenges are not attributable solely to the Bush administration's irresponsible U.S. leadership.

To be sure, the Bush administration created new conflicts and exacerbated older ones, and the administration did more than its share to damage the U.S. global image. But the Obama administration has shown that doing less and acting with deliberation and restraint will not necessarily produce better resolutions and can still result in costly and erratic policy investments with damaging long-term consequences. The evidence lies everywhere. The war in Syria is now a full-blown humanitarian disaster, Russia has overtly challenged the territorial status quo in Europe, the effects of NATO intervention in Libya have resonated widely through the flow of arms, refugees, militant ideology, and a too-infrequently recognized demonstration effect: how often do foreign-policy experts ask what Syrian President Bashar al-Assad must have thought when he saw the videos of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi's final moments?

For most of the contributors to this retrospective *Foreign Affairs* volume, the issue is not whether the United States should flaunt its power and enforce its will or, alternatively, disengage and retreat from much of the world, hoping to act or intervene selectively when necessary to deflect major challenges to vital U.S. interests. Instead, the issue is how to engage when necessary to achieve U.S. goals while avoiding the liabilities of over-commitment, which most certainly include the unnecessary entanglement of the United States in long and costly conflicts.

To various degrees, the contributors recognize that the United States must engage, disengage, and sometimes avoid disputes in various parts of the world in order to exert successful global leadership. They also acknowledge that disengagement and avoidance come with costs. In fighting *its* wars, the Obama administration has been left unable to control events on the ground and made to settle for less-than-satisfactory military outcomes, a consequence in part of relying on local forces to carry the burden of combat in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan and battling nefarious Islamist groups from the air through profligate uses of drones in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. In Ukraine, Syria, and Iraq, the United States has allowed U.S. adversaries – Russia, Iran (via Hezbollah), and Shiite militia groups, respectively -- to seize ground. Anne Applebaum wonders, in consequence, whether earlier U.S. attention to the NATO challenge in Europe would have deterred Russian adventurism.[2] Indeed, contributors recognize the liabilities of both over-commitment and underinvestment. In Asia, Thomas Christensen laments that exaggerated administration

[1] Gideon Rose, "What Obama Gets Right: Keep Calm and Carry the Liberal Order On," *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 5 (September/October 2015), 6.

[2] Anne Applebaum, "Obama and Europe: Missed Signals, Renewed Commitments," *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 5 (September/October 2015, 37-44.

claims of a U.S. 'pivot' from the Middle East to Asia that spurred Chinese fears of encirclement and led U.S. allies in Asia to conclude that the United States might 're-pivot' when the going gets tough in Asia.[3] He reflects more generally on the difficulties of managing a complex regional strategy that communicates that the United States respects Chinese core interests, that China has not been given a free hand to enforce its territorial claims or bully its neighbors, that the United States is a potential partner should regional countries feel threatened by Chinese actions, that the United States prefers that all parties act with restraint, and that no party should take U.S. support for granted in regional disputes.[4] Unsurprisingly, then, contributors highlight continuities across the Bush and Obama administrations, despite the promises and rhetoric of candidate Obama. Jessica Stern observes that Obama has maintained – even furthered – many of the Bush administration's counterterrorism policies.[5] The United States has continued its military targeting of Islamist groups, the Guantanamo prison remains open, and U.S. troops have returned to Iraq.

In this context, the Marc Lynch contribution on U.S. policy toward the Middle East is the exception, for it appears to argue for a vastly reduced U.S. regional presence.[6] Of course, his region of concern is 'the exception' because of the far-ranging effects of the region's conflicts, the intractability of the region's problems in governance and obstacles to reform, and the extent and consequences of U.S. involvement in the region's affairs. The blowback from ill-advised U.S. policy in the Middle East (from the wars in Iraq to intervention in Libya) and the multiparty battles across the Levant have silenced hawkish U.S. voices that once called loudly for direct U.S. military intervention and validated the concerns of the many who think that U.S. policies in the region do more harm than good. Thus, Lynch appears to embrace the "clear and coherent" strategic vision of the Obama administration: "'Rightsizing' the United States' footprint in the region meant not only reducing its material presence but also exercising restraint diplomatically, stepping back and challenging allies to take greater responsibility for their own security."[7] He contrasts the strategy positively with the strategy of the Bush administration, points to the Obama administration's early efforts to act on its strategy by distancing itself from Israeli policies and embracing the Arab Spring, and suggests that U.S. policies have "floundered" thereafter in implementation, having "failed either to restrain or to reassure" regional U.S. allies who covet "unconditional U.S. support rather than an honest broker."[8]

The inability to restrain or reassure amounted, nevertheless, to a strategic failing: the administration acknowledged the limits of U.S. capability but not its implications for securing influence. Recognized or not, U.S. policymakers must contend with a fundamental paradox in the Middle East, and beyond: through

[3] Thomas J. Christensen, "Obama and Asia: Confronting the China Challenge," *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 5 (September/October 2015), 29.

[4] Ibid, 28-36.

[5] Jessica Stern, "Obama and Terrorism: Like It or Not, the War Goes On," *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 5 (September/October 2015), 62-70.

[6] Marc Lynch, "Obama and the Middle East: Rightsizing the U.S. Role." *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 5 (September/October 2015), 18-27.

[7] Ibid, 18.

[8] Ibid, 18-19.

engagement, the United States both secures and loses leverage. To influence other parties and secure desirable outcomes, the United States must invest its time, resources, and prestige, and threaten or promise to invest more time, resources, and prestige, with a significant risk that U.S. support and largess will be misused, misdirected, or taken for granted. As we saw in Iraq and Afghanistan, for example, unstable governments will capitalize on an improved security environment and U.S. combat presence to resist internal reforms that would uncut their own power base. The problem for the United States, quite simply, is that too great a U.S. investment in the affairs of other governments shifts the balance in favor of those governments. They will pass the burden (cost) to the United States of achieving some shared goal and grab the benefits -- at additional cost to the United States -- by pursuing self-interested agendas. The United States can certainly try to avoid that trap with threats to reduce the U.S. commitment or to withdraw entirely as an intermediary or a party to a conflict. But the logic of the paradox blocks an easy exit. The effectiveness of threats to withdraw depends on the credibility of those threats, yet threats – if credible -- spark fears of abandonment that can reinforce misbehavior and can leave the United States with little in reserve to secure leverage with additional threats or promises.

So, Lynch's article begs a strategic question. What could the United States invest in the region – from a distance, no less -- to secure desired ends? If U.S. allies misuse U.S. aid and hijack U.S. support, why would even less U.S. involvement move local parties to act differently? More specifically, why should we presume that an outright suspension of U.S. aid to the military-led government of Egypt or a demand that Israel stop building settlements, prior to negotiations, will improve the chances of a favorable resolution? That the administration abandoned both efforts, giving rise to charges of policy inconsistencies, testifies to an administration that learned on the job that unconditional demands, though pleasing to some constituencies, frequently do not work.

That said, the Obama administration *has* pursued inconsistent policies, on multiple fronts, in efforts to solve deeply rooted regional problems. The essential issue, however, is not whether these policies are consistent with one another; it is which of these policies best serves as a workable strategy – indeed, Obama's ostensible strategy. Pushing hard to democratize the world's most authoritarian and conflict-prone region is not one of them. The policies of Obama, the prudent realist, better fit the administration's apparent strategy than do the policies of Obama, the transformationalist.

The balancing of engagement and disengagement will thus present difficult choices. In Syria, the administration confronts a tough decision: it can choose to fight the Islamic State, focus instead on weakening the Assad regime, or try to train and assemble a proxy force that could stand up to both adversaries. Rather than decide which option best serves U.S. interests and humanitarian goals, the administration has chosen to deal with one problem at a time -- by prioritizing the fight against the Islamic State -- with the hope (maybe, delusion) of eventually achieving a negotiated transition of power. Its incremental, piecemeal approach is problematic: strengthening any one party (such as the Syrian Kurds) positions that party to pursue its own agenda, setting the stage perhaps for new rounds of conflict, with new opponents (such as Turkey). The administration's decision – a non-decision of sorts -- is understandable. Knowing when and where to invest – to commit U.S. resources and prestige, draw red lines, or pull back – often requires the close look obtained through the active involvement that leads, unfortunately, to tentative and ineffective policies, at one extreme, and costly and unpalatable commitments, at the other. The harsh reality is that the United States must 'pay to play' – absorb costs to exert global influence -- not knowing which of deficient outcomes constitutes a win and a signal, then, to leave the table.

Review by Henry R. Nau, The George Washington University

In its September/October 2015 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, the Council on Foreign Relations, America's foreign policy establishment (full disclosure: I'm a member), takes stock of *Obama's World: Judging His Foreign Policy Record*. The assessment, except for articles by Bret Stephens and Anne Applebaum, is very forgiving. According to Gideon Rose, the editor of *Foreign Affairs* who writes the lead article, President Barack Obama "has done pretty well" (2), especially given the "deeply flawed" (6) policies he inherited from George W. Bush – described by Rose as men on base with no outs.[1]

Articles by regional specialists (except for Applebaum) reach similar conclusions. In the Middle East, Marc Lynch applauds Obama because he "has avoided any deep military commitments in Syria, extricated U.S. forces from Iraq, secured a nuclear deal with Iran, and endorsed the Arab uprisings" (19)[2]. He confidently predicts that the nuclear agreement with Iran "will likely build a shared interest in its continuation and begin to create common interests" such as "more effective campaigns in Iraq and Syria." In Asia, Thomas Christiansen acknowledges that U.S. China relations "are far more tense today than they were in 2009."[3] But "this is not necessarily the Obama's team fault." The Obama team "has generally done well under what have been extremely difficult circumstances" (28). In Latin America, Michael Reid concludes, Obama "has bequeathed to his successor a solid record," especially in light of "dramatic changes . . . which have inevitably reduced the United States' influence" (46).[4] In Africa, Nicolas van de Walle writes, "if . . . do no harm is the measuring stick, Obama's record in Africa can be characterized as a success" (54).[5] And on terrorism, Jessica Stern argues that Obama's record, despite the fact that "the American people find themselves living in a world with more terrorism than before Obama took office", is overall "an improvement over the Bush years" (62).[6]

Thankfully, Bret Stephens and Anne Applebaum will have none of this apologia for Obama's stewardship. Stephens asks very simply, "when does the statute of limitations on blaming George W. Bush . . . finally

[1] Gideon Rose, "What Obama Got Right: Keep Calm and Carry the Liberal Order On," *Foreign Affairs,* 94:5 (September/October 2015): 2-12.

[2] Marc Lynch, "Obama and the Middle East: Rightsizing the U.S. Role," *Foreign Affairs,* 94:5 (September/October 2015): 18-27.

[3] Thomas J. Christensen, "Obama and Asia: Confronting the China Challenge," *Foreign Affairs,* 94:5 (September/October 2015): 28-36.

[4] Michael Reid, "Obama and Latin America: A Promising Day in the Neighborhood," *Foreign Affairs,* 94:5 (September/October 2015): 45-53.

[5] Nicolas van de Walle, "Obama and Africa: Lots of Hope, Not Much Change," *Foreign Affairs,* 94:5 (September/October 2015): 54-62.

[6] Jessica Stern, "Obama and Terrorism: Like It or Not, the War Goes On," *Foreign Affairs,* 94:5 (September/October 2015): 62-70.

expire" (13)?[7] Based on the President's own promises – to close Guantanamo, reset relations with Russia, establish a strategic partnership with China, restore America's good name in Cairo, Istanbul, Damascus and other Muslim countries, and engineer an Israeli-Palestinian settlement – Stephens concludes, continuing the baseball analogy, that Obama "called his shot [a home run] only to strike out" (14). Applebaum details how Moscow "used the relatively good relations of the reset era and the Medvedev presidency to rebuild Russia's military, strengthen its internal repression, and invest in media and other companies all across Europe" (41)[8] The result: a Russian assault on Obama's twenty-first century standards of diplomacy by annexing Crimea, invading the eastern provinces of Ukraine, intervening militarily in Syria, and launching a vitriolic propaganda campaign against the West.

The case for Obama rests on an interpretation of the postwar international system that is devoid of any sense of the military and economic risks the United States and West ran in order to build and secure that system and make it prosper. According to Rose, the core of that system was a liberal order based on "democracies with mixed economies . . . nestling closely under an American security umbrella" (3). This order, he argues, was never about the Cold War; it preceded the Cold War, which was caused in turn by the Soviet refusal to take part in the liberal order. According to Rose, "it was because the Cold War and the Soviet Union were never the central parts of the story that their passing changed the world less than many expected" (3).

Having thus disposed of the Cold War and Presidents Truman through Reagan, Rose picks up the story with George H. W. Bush, who "handled American foreign policy well at the start of the post-Cold War era" (3), Bill Clinton who "also handled things well" (3), and then his nemesis, George W. Bush, who "lashed out . . . to rid the world of evil … to achieve total security by fundamentally transforming a broad swath of the world, often at the point of a gun" (5). According to Rose, Bush's policies put the core of the liberal order at risk by getting the United States sucked into quagmires on the periphery. He "tried to muscle history forward, regardless of resistance . . . taking on too many tasks of too great difficulty with too much haste, too few resources, and too little deliberation" (6). Obama's task, according to Rose, was to clean up the mess. Obama acted "to save the core of the liberal order" by being "willing to sacrifice the periphery" (7).

The idea that today's liberal order emerged before the Cold War, had little to do with the Cold War, and progressed as long as the United States avoided quagmires on the periphery is bizarre, to say the least. The core, certainly as we know it today, did not exist in 1941. It had to be created and expanded, not just defended. And it had to be made 'liberal.' The west was never, as Rose claims, open to "any country that wants to join . . . [regardless] of geography, race, religion or other ascriptive characteristics" (3). It was open to countries which were already liberal or, if not, were opposed to communism and more comfortable aligning with liberal than communist countries.

Think about it. If the core emerged before the Cold War, it must have been the victorious alliance that vanquished Nazi Germany and Japan. That included the Soviet Union, which is why Rose imagines it was part of the core until Moscow rashly bolted and started the Cold War. But that core, with the Soviet Union

[7] Bret Stephens, "What Obama Got Wrong: No Retreat, No Surrender," *Foreign Affairs,* 94:5 (September/October 2015): 13-16.

[8] Anne Applebaum, "Obama and Europe: Missed Signals, Renewed Commitments," *Foreign Affairs,* 94:5 (September/October 2015): 37-44.

included, was the United Nations, and the United Nations was not a liberal but a universal institution that brought together all countries liberal or not. And the United Nations failed spectacularly to deal with the postwar world, either to represent or defend a 'liberal' world order.

If, on the other hand, the core excluded the Soviet Union, it must have been the Atlantic Charter, the U.S.-British alliance that represented the relatively few liberal democracies that existed before the war. So what was the periphery of this core, which in Obama's world should be avoided? Was it Germany and continental Europe, where democracies were either weak, as in France and Italy, or nonexistent, as in Germany, Spain, Portugal, Greece and Turkey? Did President Truman get sucked into a quagmire on the periphery when he refused to abandon Berlin in 1948 against the advice of all his principal advisers or when he rallied UN forces to checkmate Soviet-sponsored aggression in Korea in 1950? Was the subsequent U.S. alliance with Japan or Truman's support for the creation of Israel in the Middle East (again against the advice of his principal advisers) further commitments on the periphery that sucked the United States into quagmires?

The point is that the core and periphery are not geographic distinctions, as Rose and realists believe; they are ideological ones. From this perspective, the Cold War was not a brief sidetrack of the liberal order; it was a continuation of World War II and the battle between liberal democracies and authoritarian and aggressive dictatorships. The Soviet Union was never a candidate for membership in the 'liberal' order. Not even realists, such as George Kennan, expected that. The Soviet Union might mellow and shed communism but it would never embrace liberalism. The Soviet Union was in fact the principal threat to the liberal order.

To confront and eventually overcome that threat, the United States had to assume massive and unprecedented military and economic risks to promote economic integration and nurture democratic institutions in Germany, Japan and other countries that were not yet liberal. Those risks included the closest the world ever came to nuclear armageddon, the Cuban Missile Crisis. And, yes, the United States accepted certain risks on the periphery in Asia (Vietnam), the Middle East (the 1973 cease-fire agreements and 1979 Egypt-Israeli peace treaty), and central America (resisting further Cubas). It did so not to spread democracy recklessly to the periphery but to protect the credibility of deterrence at the core. These interventions were not always successful, but they were also not always unnecessary. When South Vietnam fell, the Soviet Union took over the U.S. naval base at Cam Ranh Bay, and a Soviet-backed Vietnam invaded and occupied Cambodia (for ten years) and fought a border war with China. In that decade the Soviet Union also sent military forces into Africa and Afghanistan. Yes, the United States made mistakes, but there is no evidence that, had the West not contested these 'peripheral' challenges, the communist threat at the core would have faded away on its own.

There is no hint of any of these struggles in Rose's view of the world – even his language of allies "nestling" under the US nuclear umbrella is becalming. Truman and Reagan are airbrushed from history when in fact they created the bookends of military and economic strength that decisively won the Cold War. Truman summoned the Marshall Plan and NATO to incubate a partial and struggling liberal core in Europe and staved off Soviet-inspired military aggression in Korea even though George Kennan and other advisers opposed this extension of the Cold War to the Asian 'periphery.' Reagan then revitalized this core in both Europe and Asia by branding the Soviet Union the 'evil empire' it was and challenging it to an arms race it could not win (the stick) and a global economic boom it dare not miss (the carrot). Yes, Mikhail Gorbachev came along, in part to counter the American challenge, but he and other Soviet officials acknowledged the role that America's rebound and especially Reagan's military buildup played in Soviet calculations. Addressing the Politburo six months after taking office, Gorbachev told his colleagues: "The last thing we can afford is an

arms race with the United States; we will lose. . ."[9] General Sergei Akhromeyev, chief of the Soviet general staff at the time and a hard-line critic of Gorbachev's New Thinking (who later involved in the coup to overthrow Gorbachev, committing suicide after the coup failed), confirmed Gorbachev's conclusion: "The Soviet Union could no longer continue a policy of military confrontation with the U.S. and NATO after 1985."[10]

The historical amnesia of Rose's article also distorts the role economics played in defining and winning the Cold War. True, after World War II, the western economies were mixed, in contrast to the statist, totalitarian economies of communist countries. But the early Bretton Woods system did not move the western economies in the direction of statism or what the academy heralds as 'embedded liberalism' (a presumed trade-off that sanctioned domestic government intervention in return for opening import markets); it moved them in fact in the opposite direction toward free market policies. Industries nationalized during the war were privatized; and fiscal and monetary policies in the United States, West Germany (*marktwirtschaft*) and other European countries were conservative or non-interventionist, encouraging flexible labor markets that accommodated freer trade.[11] Had governments intervened to protect labor, as presumed by embedded liberalism, there would have been no postwar economic boom.

In fact the postwar boom nosed-dived the minute domestic policies became interventionist. In the 1970s Great Society programs, inflationary monetary and fiscal policies, and massive oil price increases strangled market incentives. U.S. and free world economies stagnated, performing not much better than the Soviet economy. In fact, oil price increases boosted the Soviet Union, an oil exporter, fueling its foreign expansion. Meanwhile, oil prices sapped the coffers as well as spirit of America and other western oil importers.

Who and what turned around this dismal world condition known as stagflation? It was Ronald Reagan, not Bill Clinton. Reagan put in place the tax-cutting and deregulatory policies that created 50 million new jobs in the 1980s and 1990s and propelled global markets into the information age, eventually drawing in the emerging and former communist nations. And he did so at considerable risk. Reagan's economic program defied conventional wisdom and tested the alliance. But it worked spectacularly. Even *Time Magazine* declared that "Ronald Reagan can now boast of having engineered one of the most stunning economic turnarounds in U.S. history."[12]

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[9] Quoted in Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "Power, Globalization, and the End of the Cold War", *International Security*, 25, 3 (Winter, 2000-01), 29.

[10] Quoted in Mark L. Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789-1989* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 178.

[11] For this story of conservative market-oriented policies after the war, especially in the United States, see Herbert Stein, *Presidential Economics: The Making of Economic Policy from Roosevelt to Clinton* (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 1994, 3rd edition). For the oft cited but lightly supported 'embedded liberalism' argument, see John G. Ruggie. "International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic System." *International Organization* 36, 2 (Spring, 1982), 379-415.

[12] Quoted in Richard Reeves, *President Reagan: The Triumph of Imagination,* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 242. For the story of this turnaround, which has been broadly neglected by academic studies, see Robert J. Samuelson, *The Great Inflation and Its Aftermath* (New York: Random House, 2008); Robert L. Paarlberg, *Leadership*

Vital to the 'liberal' postwar world economy was freer trade. The opening of markets was the signature feature of the Bretton Woods system, and it was possible only because labor was free to move from import and declining industries to export and advancing ones. That created opportunity and wealth for war-ravaged and then emerging economies in Europe and Asia. Foreign countries grew faster, but the United States prospered as well. The result was America's *relative* decline, an unprecedented (and risky) strategy of sharing wealth with allies to solidify the 'liberal' western order.

The expansion of trade also sputtered in the 1970s. High taxes and regulations froze mobility and protectionism soared. Once again, free market policies led the turnaround. Ronald Reagan initiated the North American Economic Accord and the Uruguay Round, which became the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) and were completed under George H.W. Bush. Clinton had the courage and good sense to push these agreements through Congress, against the opposition of many in his own party. But if Clinton gets credit for that, he also gets blame for failing to launch the next round of free trade negotiations in Seattle in 1999, which crashed spectacularly due to Clinton's ambivalence. George W. Bush did the heavy lifting to initiate the Doha Round in 2002. But then Obama sidelined the Doha Round to negotiate the TransPacific Partnership (TPP), a more limited opening of markets in Asia, which he has yet to pass through Congress.

Military and economic leverage are crucial for successful negotiations, a point that Obama's supporters and Rose's article completely miss. To think that the Soviet Union collapsed on its own and that time by itself dispatches despots to the dustbin of history – Rose's claim that "time and tide are generally on the side of the [liberal] order rather than the side of its few remaining enemies" (12) – is Pollyannaish. The conclusion seems to be that if we just huddle together in the core and stay away from military adventures on the periphery, the liberal order will advance.

This historical reboot provides a totally different and less forgiving assessment of Obama's defense of the western liberal order. As Applebaum points out, Obama had no defense policy for his first three years and then proposed a sequester strategy to cut the federal budget across the board, hoping that conservative Republicans in Congress would not accept military cuts to reduce the overall fiscal deficit. Conservatives called his bluff, and the defense budget eroded. Obama conducted negotiations with Russia, China, Iran, and Cuba while steadily drawing down America's military leverage, giving up missile defense installations in eastern Europe even before negotiations with Russia began, pulling all U.S. forces out of Iraq, thereby effectively abandoning it to Iran and ISIS, providing no lethal assistance in the military conflicts in Syria or Ukraine, and pivoting diminished naval forces from the Mediterranean to Asia. Meanwhile, maximizing their military leverage, Obama's negotiating partners invaded Crimea and Syria, destabilized Ukraine, built military facilities on South China Sea islands, coddled an increasingly bellicose North Korea, and stepped up military assistance to Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, Hamas and other terrorist organizations around the Middle East.

Without leverage, Obama's diplomacy wilts. The periphery closes in on the core. Today, according to Rose, the Middle East, Ukraine, and Iran are all peripheral areas that should be avoided. After quoting Obama approvingly that the United States "will ensure the free flow of energy" (8), Rose goes on to say that the United States can retreat to the sidelines in the Middle East: "if the Middle East is bent on convulsing itself in

Abroad Begins at Home (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1995); and my own account, *The Myth of America's Decline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

costly disasters, … trying to play a constructive role from the sidelines rather than getting embroiled directly represents not weakness but prudence" (9) The pivot, which is the only military move Obama made, reduced military assets in the Middle East. And if that pivot was considered "overly muscular" (29) in the Far East, as Christensen claims, think of the signal it sent to America's enemies in the Middle East, where Obama threatened the use of force as a last resort and then immediately moved U.S. forces relatively out of the region.

Or, comparing Ukraine to the satellite communist countries of Europe during the Cold War, Rose writes: "The United States did not intervene in similar situations in Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, or Poland in 1981, why should it be expected to do so in Ukraine in 2014? Ukraine is not a member of NATO; it is still part of Europe's strategic periphery rather than part of its core." Rose concludes that "Ukraine will probably join the liberal order eventually, when circumstances permit" (8). Finally, after quoting Obama again that the United States "will not tolerate the development or use of weapons of mass destruction" (8), Rose applauds the Iran nuclear agreement as "a solid arms control agreement trading sanctions relief for a decade pause in Iran's quest for a bomb" (9-10). The United States will not tolerate nuclear weapons in Iran yet it concludes an agreement that does not end but merely 'pauses' Iran's nuclear program for 15 years – and that assumes that the agreement works perfectly. Fortunately, Truman and Reagan did not think this way. As Bret Stephens writes in his new book, this definition of the periphery spells *Retreat*, not defense of the liberal core.[13]

What about Obama's economic program? It has produced the slowest economic recovery in the country's history with more people leaving the work force than ever before. Is that because of the so-called Great Recession, again for Obama and Rose the fault of his predecessor? Not quite. By measures of both unemployment and inflation, the recession of 1981-82 was worse than the one in 2008-09, and George W. Bush, not Obama, initiated the bailouts that saved the financial system.[14] Obama's stimulus, regulatory (Dodd-Frank), and health programs only added obstacles to an anemic recovery and massive long-term debt to the nation's future.

The point is that Obama has accepted America's decline as an irreversible fact; Reagan did not. And, as Reagan's turnaround from the 1970s illustrates, decline is a choice, not a necessity.

Obama and his supporters are right about one point, however. The United States cannot press ahead to advance freedom at all points of the periphery at once. George W. Bush's call to "seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world" was also Pollyannaish.[15] The next president has to set priorities. And those priorities should be to defend and succor freedom in countries on the borders of existing free countries. Today these borders include the Balkans, Ukraine and Turkey between Russia and free Europe, and South Korea and

[13] Bret Stephens, *America in Retreat: The New Isolationism and the Coming Global Disorder* (New York: Sentinel, 2015).

[14] For the details, see my essay, "'The Great Expansion': The Economic Legacy of Ronald Reagan," in Jeffrey L. Chidester and Paul Kengor, eds., *Reagan's Legacy in a World Transformed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 24-38.

[15] See second inaugural address: http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4460172

Taiwan between China and Free Asia (Japan). On these borders, losing freedom directly threatens the core, and spreading freedom costs less because of the strong liberal alliances and markets that back it up. In the Middle East and South Asia the priority should be to defeat radical Islam not to spread democracy. In this fight, ideology still matters (for example, calling the threat radical Islam, not just violent extremism) but mostly to force moderate Muslim countries to choose between a modernity that accommodates religion and a religion that rejects modernity.[16]

The Council's assessment dumbs down the standards for American foreign policy. Obama gets high marks for avoiding problems and making sure things did not get worse.[17] By these standards, almost anything qualifies as success. Obama's liberal order, and the one described by Rose, is without teeth, either military or economic. It's doubtful that America's adversaries will be fooled. America is heading toward cataclysmic events both at home (debt bomb) and abroad (further terrorist strikes from ISIS-controlled territory; as this review was being written, the November 2015 Paris attacks were underway), and Mr. Obama's feckless policies will bear much of the blame. Maybe the statute of limitations runs out on Bush when Obama leaves office. But do not count on the foreign policy establishment and its flagship journal *Foreign Affairs* to lead the way. They decided from the outset that Obama could not fail.

[16] For more on these priorities, see my book, *Conservative Internationalism: Armed Diplomacy under Jefferson, Polk, Truman and Reagan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015 paperback). See also John M. Owen, IV *Confronting Political Islam: Six Lessons from the West's Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

[17] See an earlier assessment of Obama's foreign policy along the same lines, by Martin Indyk, Kenneth Lieberthal, and Michael O'Hanlon, "Scoring Obama's Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 91:3 (May/June 2012), 29-44.