

New Tools for New Times

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A central theme of Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign was the need to revitalize the institutions of governance for 21st century problems. "We cannot meet 21st-century challenges with a 20th-century bureaucracy," he declared in one notable stump speech, and the sentiment was repeated throughout his campaign. Once in office, President Obama made the same claim regarding international order and governance. The 2010 National Security Strategy acknowledged that in a world facing transnational threats, and one where "new centers of influence" would shape diplomatic options, international cooperation was a necessity. But it recognized that outdated institutions are as much an obstacle for international governance as outdated financial rules are an impediment to managing the global economy. The NSS asserted that, "As influence extends to more countries and capitals, we will build new and deeper partnerships in every region, and strengthen international standards and institutions."

Two years in, the Obama administration has made good headway on the first part of that goal. The passage of New START capped a successful two-year effort to reforge the relationship with Russia, and shows that Washington is, after all, capable of mustering bipartisan support for international cooperation. As for China, for all of the *sturm und drang* in the bilateral relationship, Washington and Beijing worked in close cooperation to respond to the global financial crisis and set up new tools for global financial regulation. And just last month, the U.S. and China came together to push through governance reform of the IMF, despite resistance from America's European allies. The process of forging a strategic alliance with India, begun under the Clinton administration and deepened by the Bush administration, has been taken to the next level with Obama's November 2010 visit and the U.S. endorsement of India's claim for a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council. Relations were more turbulent with President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's Brazil, but with new Brazilian leadership now in place, a broader strategic and economic relationship looks set to solidify. Most importantly, the administration moved rapidly to recognize the G-20 Leaders Summit as "the pre-eminent forum" for international economic cooperation -- signaling the new emerging powers' arrival at global governance's top table.

The challenge now is to pick up the second part of the sentence: ". . . and strengthen international standards and institutions." The NSS itself gives guidance as to where: for countering violent extremism and insurgency, sustaining the global economy, stopping the spread of nuclear weapons, tackling climate change, and managing conflict. That familiar list also includes a refreshing addition: "helping countries feed themselves and care for their sick" -- a humane addition from a historically humane country.

Most observers would add the problem of biological security, and as we learn more about the changing patterns of global energy and food consumption, the business of energy and management of scarce resources looms larger. Global-governance specialists point out two additional concerns. The first is managing global migration

flows, especially if we end up seeing large flows from populous and fragile states, while the second is maritime security.

To better figure out how to meet these challenges, it helps to map the problems against existing institutions or governance arrangements, and see where the gaps are. Those gaps should then be ranked according to some sort of prioritization -- though that is a fraught and politicized exercise, since what constitutes a priority for the U.S. or Europe may not be one for China or India. Still, there are common problems and increasingly common perceptions in some areas.

One such area, of course, is climate change. There is little doubt that global governance in the 21st century will need a climate/energy pillar to complement a revitalized and re-regulated economic pillar, now emerging from the G-20's efforts. Strobe Talbott and William Antholis' recent book, "Fast Forward," offers an impassioned analysis of why we need to move swiftly in this area, and how to do it. Their model for a Global Agreement on the Reduction of Emissions warrants serious attention.

Less attention has been paid to the prospect for better international cooperation on security. Yet the U.S., our allies, and the emerging powers share important interests in maintaining a stable international system, both by deterring non-state threats and by building institutions that can channel the energies of new rising powers into cooperation rather than conflict. Here's a partial list of places to start filling gaps:

Counterterrorism. During the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign, then-candidate John Edwards called for the establishment of a new Counter Terrorism Organization (CTO), modeled on the World Trade Organization -- a treaty-based body that would amplify states' cooperation to combat terrorism and extremism. An alternative model is a U.N. High Commissioner for Counterterrorism and the Rule of Law, modeled on the high commissioner for refugees. Such a body would be based on strong, existing laws on counterterrorism and designed to help states build their own capacity to deter terrorism, organized crime and other forms of lawlessness.

Biological security. Anyone wanting to keep themselves awake nights should read the latest science on the manipulation and weaponization of biological material. Efforts to build defenses against deliberate or even accidental release of deadly pathogens suffer from a basic problem: The knowledge to manipulate biological material is widely diffused, but no scientific or industry consensus exists about the degree of danger or about necessary mitigation measures. Stanford scholar Stephen Stedman is exploring whether the model used to build scientific consensus on climate change, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), could be adapted to start building consensus, awareness and ultimately action on biological threats.

Maritime security. The multilateral naval missions dispatched to combat modern-day pirates attacking trans-oceanic shipping off the coast of Somalia are a remarkable instance of global cooperation. There off the Horn of Africa, the U.S. Navy operates alongside loosely coordinated patrols comprising the navies of Europe, India, Brazil and China -- all deployed under the mandate of a U.N. Security Council resolution. This

experience could potentially provide a model to help bridge the gap between existing arrangements, in the Straits of Hormuz and other vital shipping lanes, which rely on U.S. maritime security guarantees, and ones where “new centers of influence” with growing naval capacities increasingly participate.

U.N. Security Council. Last but certainly not least, the question of membership of the U.N. Security Council looms large. India wants a seat, as does Brazil, and both are campaigning for them alongside Germany and Japan as the self-styled G-4. Conventional wisdom has it that China will oppose permanent seats for either India or Japan. In reality, no one is actually gunning for permanent seats -- that ship has sailed. What the G-4 actually want are long-term elected seats -- a so-called “business class” seat, with an option for a later upgrade. China is on record in support of that option, and the U.S. recharged the debate with its recent pronouncement on India. If Obama wants to leave a legacy of international institutions that can more effectively manage the 21st century’s challenges, the Security Council is a vital part of that process. And reform might just be an easier sell than the skeptics think.

The century ahead will be characterized by “new centers of influence,” new potential rivalries, and new forms of threat, some from non-state actors. No question, we live in new times. Now we need to get on with the business of building new tools to guide us through them.