



**THE MAKING
AND UNMAKING
OF FOREIGN
POLICY IN THE
AGE OF OBAMA
BY HENRY R. NAU**

THE JIGSAW PUZZLE & THE CHESS BOARD

THE CASE FOR Barack Obama's foreign policy is as follows: He inherited a catastrophic world of woe from his predecessor, including two foreign wars, an aggressive al-Qaeda, a deep mistrust of the United States abroad, and a shaken economy at home. Today, the woe is waning: Troops are home from Iraq and gradually but inexorably coming

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home from Afghanistan; Osama bin Laden and 20 of his top comrades are dead; America is more popular overseas; diplomatic initiatives have reduced nuclear weapons and tightened sanctions on Iran; and the economy is slowly struggling back. The nation has turned the corner.

The case against Obama's foreign policy paints a different picture: He has alienated key American allies. He has achieved only modest returns from outreach to Russia, China, Iran, and the Muslim world. He has stalled the American economic recovery and embraced an image of the United States as a declining power. Meanwhile, Russia expands its influence in Georgia, Ukraine, and Central Asia. China coddles an increasingly erratic North Korea and threatens

Asian sea lanes. Iran draws closer to acquiring nuclear weapons. And the Arab Spring may become a Muslim Winter if Islamist governments tilt the balance against moderate Arab states and sever peace agreements with Israel. In short, war clouds may be gathering, especially in the Persian Gulf.

Which case is correct?

If world politics is like a great big jigsaw puzzle in which many countries have to solve many problems cooperatively—not competitively—before the final picture falls into place, then Obama’s record looks quite good. He has downplayed differences of ideology and power that divide countries, defined problems of common interest, rallied multilateral institutions to the task, and put some pieces into place, such as the New START Treaty with Russia and further rounds of sanctions against Iran.

On the other hand, if the world works more like a chess match than a jigsaw puzzle, Obama’s record is troubling. In a match of chess, players seek to win, not cooperate; to checkmate and defeat one another, not to address common agendas. In this world, Russia moves its pawns permanently into Georgia, checkmates the orange revolution in Ukraine, and stalks what it calls “a sphere of privileged interest” in the former Soviet space. China revs up its economy, to some extent at the expense of the world economy, and extends its “core” interests to resource-rich islands in the South and East China Seas. Iran dismisses Obama’s open hand and, with Russian help, arms clients in Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, and (increasingly) Iraq. North Korea attacks its neighbors, and China supports a besieged Pakistan as the United States withdraws from Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda may be on the run, but its backers—failed, rogue, and authoritarian states—may be on the rise.

Which way does the world work? At times it works both ways. After World War II, the European countries abandoned centuries of chessboard conflict to put together the jigsaw puzzle of the European Union and, with the United States, the NATO alliance. At the same time, the U.S., Europe, and Japan played chess to mobilize countervailing alliances, checkmate, and ultimately defeat the Soviet Union. The trick is how to integrate the two approaches and when to emphasize each.

George W. Bush, it may be argued, saw the world too much in terms of a chess match and too little in terms of a jigsaw puzzle. He won two wars, thus displaying exceptional skill at chess, then failed to follow up with a diplomacy that could bring countries together to reassemble the jigsaw puzzle in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Barack Obama may be doing exactly the opposite. He sees the world too much as a jigsaw puzzle and

too little as a chess match. He stakes too much on diplomatic hope and too little on military leverage, creating the impression that the United States is a paper tiger content to see its power decline and watch other nations lead.

Successful presidents have integrated the two approaches. The best examples are Harry Truman and Ronald Reagan. They crafted the strategies that book-ended the Cold War, confronting the Soviet Union with a chess match—inspired arms race while inviting Moscow to the global table to assemble the jigsaw puzzle. Stalin thwarted the United Nations option, but Gorbachev eventually embraced a “common European home” and economic globalization.

Will the next American president get the mix right? If Obama is reelected, he will have to pay more attention to defense and allies. As Clinton learned in Bosnia and Kosovo, military muscle is the indispensable backbone of both economic sanctions and credible multilateralism. Mitt Romney, the likely Republican challenger, will have to come up with a jigsaw-puzzle diplomacy that motivates the continued assertion of American leadership and power.

The American public is fatigued and needs to be persuaded that the United States is still the only country that can ensure a world that is both safe and free.

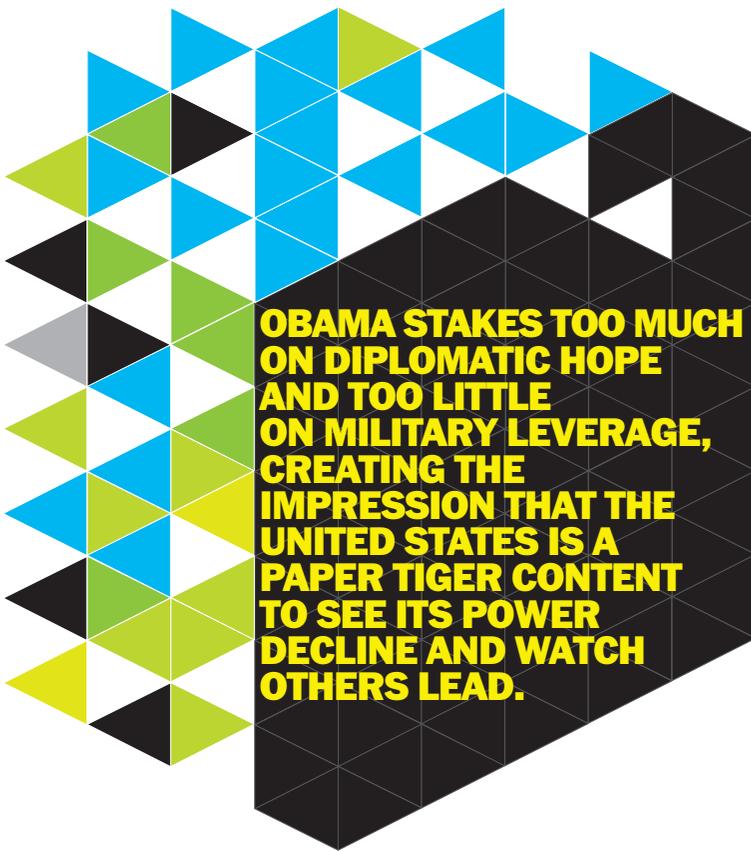
THE JIGSAW PUZZLE

FOUR propositions define a jigsaw-puzzle view of the world.

First, problems in the world are created by material circumstances, by resource shortages and institutional deficiencies, not by moral or political conflicts. Countries must face and solve these problems together regardless of their cultural, religious, or ideological makeup. Material problems create practical opportunities that override political differences.

What are these material problems? At the United Nations in September 2009 and again in his National Security Strategy issued in June 2010, Obama identified four material problems that the world must confront and solve together: (1) proliferation of nuclear weapons and materials threatening and inciting violence, (2) the promotion of peace and security, primarily through multilateral institutions, (3) the management of global resources and the preservation of our planet, and (4) the revival of the global economy that alleviates poverty and dispels oppression.

In speeches over the past three years, Obama has made it clear that moral or competitive aspects of



international relations are not the focus of his foreign policy. In Prague in April 2009, he warned, “When nations and peoples allow themselves to be defined by their differences, the gulf between them widens.” So he dialed down Bush’s emphasis on the spread of freedom, democracy, and human rights. Democracy is not, in Obama’s view, one of the global “challenges” that nations face together; save for a speech in Ghana in July 2009, Obama always lists democracy and human rights late or last. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has followed suit. In Latin America, she urged, “Let’s put ideology aside; that is so yesterday”; in China, she warned, “pressing on those [human-rights] issues can’t interfere with the global economic crisis, the global climate-change crisis, and the security crisis.”

Obama has made important progress on non-proliferation and multilateral peacekeeping. He signed a New START agreement with Russia, which aims to lower the number of nuclear arms, and initiated a process to identify and lock down loose nukes and eventually reduce nuclear weapons to zero. He won United Nations cooperation for a third round of sanctions against Iran; and now, with the European Union and Japan (China and Russia opting out), he is implementing the fourth and most significant round, to embargo Iranian oil exports and global financing. He led, albeit “from behind,” the NATO intervention in Libya. And, most recently on February 29, 2012, he concluded

the “leap year agreement” with North Korea, providing food aid in return for yet another promise from Pyongyang to suspend enrichment and missile activities. He achieved less success on climate change and global growth. China snubbed the United States at climate conferences and halted the revaluation of its currency to boost Chinese exports when a flagging global economy needed more Chinese imports.

The hope of the jigsaw-puzzle approach is that the world will progressively isolate Iran and North Korea and then those countries will come back to the table because their pieces of the puzzle are congruent with the rest and they share the same final vision of the end result. In the meantime, the intervention in Libya signals that the world community can and will enforce some red lines against the worst domestic atrocities, such as genocide.

The second feature of the jigsaw-puzzle view is that the material problems of the world are connected and must be solved simultaneously. Because the problems are interwoven, there are no priorities among them. A puzzle comes together only if the players consider all the pieces concurrently, separating them out into those that go on the edge of the puzzle, those that have the same color, and so on. If players select some pieces as priorities and those pieces don’t fit the parts they have already assembled, then they cannot complete the puzzle.

So, in a jigsaw-puzzle view of the world, *all* problems become priorities. In his first three years in office, Obama addressed every conceivable foreign-policy crisis on the globe. He reset relations with Russia, touted a strategic partnership with China, wound down wars in Iraq and Afghanistan but expanded counterterrorist attacks in Pakistan, tightened sanctions on Iran and North Korea, extended an open hand to the Muslim world, sought to regain Europe’s trust, jump-started the Middle East peace process, and promoted economic recovery, climate change, and energy independence. He dispatched “special envoys” to every corner of the world: the Middle East, Iran, North Korea, Sudan/Darfur, and Afghanistan-Pakistan.

He rarely told us which problems deserved particular attention. Obama thinks in terms of systems, not in order of priority. Problems have to be dealt with

simultaneously, not in order. As Niall Ferguson, the British historian, complains: “The defining characteristic of Obama’s foreign policy has been not just a failure to prioritize but also a failure to recognize the need to do so.” A puzzle-solver reacts to problems. He does not define them.

But wait a minute. Isn’t Obama now setting priorities in the Pacific? He told Australia’s parliament last fall:

The United States is turning our attention to the vast potential of the Asia Pacific region. . . . I have directed my national-security team to make our presence and mission in the Asia Pacific a top priority. As a result, reductions in U.S. defense spending will not—I repeat, will not—come at the expense of the Asia Pacific.

That sounds like a change, but consider: Obama’s new military-strategic guidance document issued in January 2012 calls the policy toward Asia a “rebalancing” not a “pivot.” That would be more like a return to normal after Iraq and Afghanistan, not a higher priority for Asia. The same document also says, “Europe is our principal partner in seeking global and economic security, and will remain so for the foreseeable future.”

The third feature of a jigsaw-puzzle view of the world is that all countries share interests in the problems and therefore must be at the table to solve them. Multilateralism is the bumper sticker of Obama’s foreign policy. Shared interests trump sovereign interests. At the UN in 2009, Obama declared, “It is my deeply held belief that in the year 2009—more than at any point in human history—the interests of nations and peoples are shared.”

Thus the UN is the principal forum for dealing with Iran, the G-20 for the global economy, NATO for Libya, the Arab League for Syria, and nuclear summits for nonproliferation.

One of Obama’s own staff members referred to this as “leading from behind.” The United States remains a catalyst for global action but fades to the background, encouraging other countries to take the lead. Obama sees Libya as the model for this approach. At a “High Level Meeting on Libya” in New York in September 2011, he explained its significance:

Important, too, is how this [Libyan] effort succeeded—thanks to the leadership and contributions of many countries. The United States was proud to play a decisive role, especially in the early days, and then in a supporting capacity. But let’s remember that it was the Arab League that appealed for action. It was the

world’s most effective alliance, NATO, that’s led a military coalition of nearly 20 nations. It’s our European allies—especially the United Kingdom and France and Denmark and Norway—that conducted the vast majority of air strikes protecting rebels on the ground. It was Arab states who joined the coalition, as equal partners. And it’s been the United Nations and neighboring countries—including Tunisia and Egypt—that have cared for the Libyans in the urgent humanitarian effort that continues today.

This is how the international community should work in the 21st century—more nations bearing the responsibility and the costs of meeting global challenges.

Obama has a point. Multilateralism *is* desirable and, *relatively*, U.S. power has been waning ever since 1945. At some point, Washington will pass the baton. No country stays on top forever. At the end of the 19th century, Great Britain eventually yielded the top spot to the United States. And since 1945, America has designed and welcomed a world in which other countries have caught up and competed with the United States—first Europe and Japan, then the other Asian tigers, and most recently the emerging countries, especially China and India. So the real question is not whether America’s power is declining *relatively*—that is not new and, for 65 years, has not been consequential—but whether America remains strong *absolutely* and willing to lead *assertively* because it brings to the table something indispensable that no other country does.

Obama is not sure that American leadership is indispensable and exceptional: “I believe in American exceptionalism,” he said famously in 2009, “just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism.” Thus, he is comfortable with the idea of reduced American leadership. Other countries—the European Union, China, Russia, Japan—will step in to shoulder the stanchions of freedom and open markets as the United States steps back. Multilateralism has no consequence for outcomes because everyone envisions the same picture at the end of the puzzle. And multilateralism has an important additional benefit. It not only enables shared leadership but also imposes shared accountability. It “constrains” the United States, which Obama believes too often acts in unexceptional and unacceptable ways—Douglas J. Feith and Seth Cropsey writing in COMMENTARY in July/August 2011 call this approach a “policy of self-containment.”

The fourth and final feature of a jigsaw-puzzle view of the world is that the use of force is a last resort after

diplomacy fails. Using force during negotiations breaks up the cooperative game and almost always results in more violence. Players rely on respect to get things done, and threat and intimidation undermine respect. Diplomacy isolates and shames recalcitrant countries to come back into the fold; coercion alienates them.

Thus, when dissidents in Iran produced the first buds of the Arab Spring in June 2009, President Obama declined to support the dissidents for fear that it would disrupt the prospects of negotiations with the Iranian government. He worried that by identifying too closely with them, he would make the United States the issue rather than the discontent of Iranian citizens. He told reporters, "We respect Iranian sovereignty and want to avoid the United States being the issue inside of Iran." But protesters in the streets understood that, where freedom is concerned, America is already the issue: "Obama, Obama, either you're with them or with us," they chanted.

If pressure is necessary, Obama prefers so-called smart power over conventional military power. Smart power involves multilateral sanctions, economic and diplomatic, designed to isolate and reform adversaries, not defeat them. It deploys forces from offshore, thereby minimizing boots on the ground, and strikes terrorists in one-off interventions with drones, missiles, and special operations after terrorists attack rather than before they attack (that's "dumb power," e.g., Iraq). Iranian sanctions and raids to kill Osama bin Laden and rescue American hostages in Somalia are the faces of the new smart power.

The jigsaw-puzzle view is coherent. Obama and many others believe it is best suited for a cash-strapped Washington and war-weary America. Obama is patiently isolating the Iranians, passively following the Arab Spring in Egypt, calmly waiting for consensus in Syria, hoping to stock up good will with Russia and China, and subtly repositioning America to lead from behind. As he repeated in Ghana, Oslo, and at the UN, "history is on our side." In a jigsaw-puzzle world, time is no constraint because all countries envision the same outcome when the pieces of the puzzle are finally assembled.

THE CHESSBOARD

BUT WHAT IF other countries have aggressive intentions? What if they see the world as a chess match more than a jigsaw puzzle?

In the chessboard view of the world, problems are primarily political, not material. Interests are sovereign, not shared; outcomes are zero-sum (if one side goes up, the other goes down), not congruent; and the use or threat of force is lever-

age inside and outside negotiations, not a last resort if negotiations fail.

Each nation seeks material gain, to be sure, but it also seeks to live in a world that shares more of its moral standards and solves problems in ways that advance its cultural and political influence. The United States does not feel comfortable in a world of fascist or Communist countries, and Russia and China do not feel comfortable in a world of liberal democracies. Thus, while the United States seeks to spread political standards of human rights and the democratic rule of law, Russia and China prefer a world that is more sympathetic to elites and authority. They oppose interventions in sovereign nations, such as Kosovo, Libya, Syria, Iran, and North Korea, designed to advance humanitarian or democratic goals.

Russia sees problems as matters of sovereign, not shared, interests. President Vladimir Putin touts "sovereign" democracy and shuts down private media sources, fires elected provincial governors, and jails political opponents. Russian leaders arm the Syrian government to kill civilian protesters, while they oppose UN or NATO action to stop the killing in Libya and veto further UN sanctions to end Iran's nuclear program.

China sees the world in terms of expanding statist and mercantilist ideologies, not in terms of solving common problems of exchange-rate misalignments and global warming. It uses foreign aid to lock up resources and strengthen government, not market, ties. And despite appearances of progress at recent climate meetings in South Africa, China bluntly tells the advanced countries, "You created the problem so you solve it." On the economic front, China seeks a Beijing consensus, not a Washington consensus.

Playing chess, Russia and China use the existence or implied threat of force to leverage their positions inside as well as outside negotiations. Inside negotiations, Russia uses the New START agreement, whose caps cut U.S. but not Russian warheads and delivery vehicles, to enhance its own nuclear arsenal while reducing America's. It strenuously opposes NATO-theater missile defenses against Iran because those defenses exclude Russia and weaken its status as a great power at the negotiating table. Outside negotiations, Russia suspends its observance of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) agreement, maintains occupying forces in Georgia, fends off military talks between Caucasus states and NATO, and expands naval bases in Syria. It shelters troops in Moldova and persistently pressures Ukraine to fall in line with Belarus and Kazakhstan to form a "Eurasian Union," a counterweight of authoritarian states to the democratic European Union. And

from time to time, it uses Kaliningrad, the wellspring of the former Soviet military, to warn Europe that it will deploy tactical missiles in that enclave if NATO proceeds with European theater missile defenses.

Outside negotiations, China suddenly escalates its claim of sovereignty over resource-rich islands in the South China Sea and rams two Japanese coast guard vessels near uninhabited islands (Senkaku in Japan; Diaoyu in China) in the East China Sea, disputed by China and Japan. Most ominously, China steadfastly backs North Korea, which has sunk a South Korean naval vessel and bombed civilian targets on South Korean islands.

What exactly did the United States do to provoke China's sudden departure from its "peaceful rise" strategy? After all, in the last decade, the United States presumably pivoted away from Asia and focused on the Middle East and South Asia; now it wishes to pivot back to Asia. Washington reduced the number of forces in South Korea and moved them away from the North Korean border. It set plans to reposition other U.S. forces farther away from China's shores—to Guam from Okinawa and to Australia from East Asia. The short answer is that the United States did nothing to provoke China. Beijing, playing chess, acted out of its own interests and agenda. It sought to improve outcomes outside negotiations while it used delaying tactics in six-party talks on North Korea to pacify its partners.

Iran expands its footprint throughout the Middle East and Central Asia. It supports terrorism unabated through Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and increasingly the Sadr militia in Iraq. It backs the Assad government in Syria and stonewalls UN requests to report all nuclear activities; all the while, the International Atomic Energy Agency declares that Iran is pursuing a nuclear-weapons program.

While jigsaw-puzzle countries play defense, solving problems as they pop up, chess countries play offense, *creating* problems where their priorities dictate.

Obama is not unaware of the chessboard. He just downplays it, hoping that the jigsaw puzzle will be more seductive. He said in his Nobel Prize speech in Oslo, "Make no mistake: Evil does exist in the world." But then he reaffirmed his self-styled pragmatic approach by quoting John F. Kennedy: "Let us focus on a more practical, more attainable peace, based not on a sudden revolution in human nature but on a gradual evolution in human institutions." He intervened in Libya for humanitarian, not strategic, reasons. What happens in Libya is far less important to the future of the Middle East than what happens in Egypt, Syria, or Iran. Yet Obama intervened in the geostrategic situation that mattered least.

So far, we know two things about when Obama might use force. He will use it after the United States has been attacked (a "war of necessity," as he called the war in Afghanistan) but not before, in anticipation or prevention of an attack (a "war of choice," as he called the war in Iraq). In the first case, he surged troops in Afghanistan and ordered risky raids to kill Osama bin Laden in Pakistan and rescue American hostages in Somalia. In the second case, he used force to prevent genocide in Libya.

But when will he use force *before an attack* in strategic situations that matter *more* than the one in Libya? When will he insert or maneuver force to deter rather than defend? He repeatedly says that all options are on the table, but he acts differently. He scaled back missile defenses in the European theater before he cut a deal with Russia on New Start, and now Russia plays the card again, asking for explicit NATO guarantees before missile defenses proceed. He removes U.S. forces completely from Iraq even as he escalates economic sanctions against Iran and as Iran accelerates its meddling in Iraq. The reason, he says, is that Baghdad refused to sign a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). But the reason is more ominous. The Sadr faction in Iraq backed by Iran violently opposed a SOFA. Obama could not convince the Iraqi government that the U.S. is a better bet for Iraq's future than the Sadr movement is.

Obama set a deadline to leave Afghanistan by 2014, perhaps as early as 2013, according to Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta. He wants a SOFA from Kabul, but will he get it, and if he does, will it be enough? Groups in Pakistan, India, Iran, and Afghanistan oppose such a SOFA, just as groups in Iraq did. And all groups wonder about what will follow when America reduces its role. After all, Obama has already decided that the future U.S. military strategy in South Asia will be counterterrorism, not counterinsurgency. From now on, terrorist attacks will be met by "offshore" cruise missiles, pilotless drones, and swift special-operation strikes, not "boots on the ground" as in Iraq and Afghanistan. This offshore counterterrorism strategy is the one Vice President Joseph Biden advocated in 2009. Obama overruled Biden back then, but now he embraces Biden's strategy. Did he favor it all along, and was the counterinsurgency surge in Afghanistan, which ends this summer shortly before the presidential election, intended mostly to establish his credentials as commander in chief?

What if the offshore approach is inadequate over the long run? It promises retaliation only if terrorists use Iraqi or Afghan territory to strike the United States. But what if terrorists use Iraqi or Afghan territory to expand their influence in neighboring states,

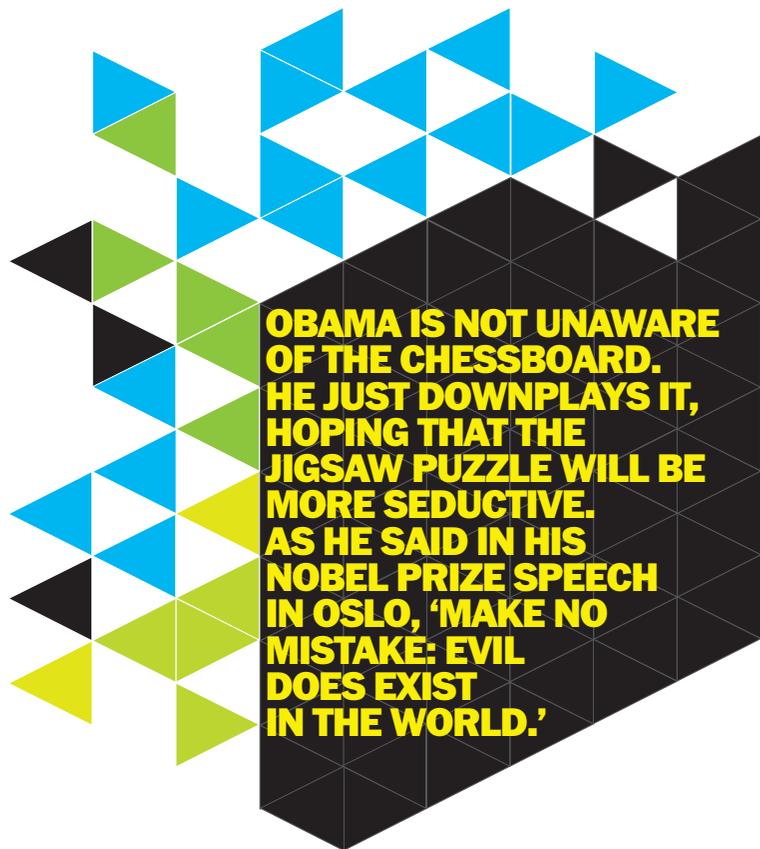
Iran in Iraq and Pakistan in Afghanistan? Isn't that exactly what the Sadr militia and the Pakistan-assisted Taliban are doing? The United States may fight back with words or money, but Obama is committed to the withdrawal of American forces. There is minimal chance, given what we know thus far about his views on the use of force, that he will reinsert American military forces in either region *before* another attack occurs. As Anne-Marie Slaughter, the State Department's policy-planning director for two years, writes, "Military action will remain an option but would run counter to the Obama administration's entire strategy of integrating rising powers into a strong international order." An option that runs counter to your whole strategy, of course, is not really an option at all.

So, are the Iraqi and Afghan governments on their own? They seem to think so. Both the Karzai government in Kabul and the military-dominated government in Pakistan are distancing themselves from the United States and making arrangements with India and China to deal with the post-American era. Pakistan worries more about what happens after American forces leave Afghanistan than about what homegrown terrorists might do to destabilize its own government.

The scramble to replace American power may be under way. This could be a dangerous time for the world, reminiscent of the scramble to replace American power after the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam. That withdrawal eventually led to a Soviet naval base in Vietnam and Moscow's invasion of Afghanistan.

BOTH the jigsaw and chessboard views of the world make sense under certain circumstances. Knowing how and when to combine them is the mark of great leadership.

George W. Bush pushed the chessboard view too far. He saw terrorism as a moral struggle, but he failed to complement that view with a timely jigsaw-puzzle strategy. The time for diplomacy was most favorable in the summer of 2003. The successful invasions of both Afghanistan and Iraq gave Washington substantial leverage, despite lingering unhappiness over the war, to structure a broader multilateral approach to peace in both the Middle East



and South Asian regions. Bush's father did exactly that in the Middle East after the successful Persian Gulf War of 1991. He launched the Madrid Conference, which eventually spawned the Oslo Accords—a step considered a success at the time. By contrast, Bush, the son, delayed a peace initiative in the Middle East for four and a half years, finally launching one too late in November 2007, and he neglected nation-building to some degree in Afghanistan while the Taliban regained its footing.

Obama's error, however, may be precisely the opposite. He is overplaying the jigsaw-puzzle view of the world and leaving himself vulnerable if other major countries play chess, as they certainly do. Unlike Truman or Reagan, he does not see that the ambitious diplomacy he favors requires a robust defense budget. He is cutting defense spending by \$487 billion over 10 years and by another \$600 billion if Congress cannot reach a budget compromise by the end of this year. Not until January 2012 did Obama "for the first time," as the *New York Times* reported, "put his own stamp on an all-encompassing American military policy" to address what kind of military the United States needs for the future. Isn't that something he should have done at the beginning, before he began withdrawing forces from Iraq and Afghanistan?

Obama is potentially painting an image of the United States as a paper tiger. Speaking to reporters

in Singapore in 2010, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates was compelled to deny it: “I don’t think anybody believes the United States is a paper tiger.” And, more recently, Obama had to deny that he was bluffing about using force on behalf of Israel: “I think that the Israeli government recognizes that, as president of the United States, I don’t bluff.” The bottom line: When you have to deny something, it generally suggests the charges are beginning to stick.

Without a greater willingness to integrate the use of force with diplomacy, Obama’s foreign policy is flaccid. In the short run, diplomacy buys time and raises expectations. But in the long run, unless military power cuts off alternatives outside negotiations and invites serious bargaining inside negotiations, diplomacy endangers the cause of freedom—in the streets of Iran and Egypt, the Stalinist bunkers of North Korea, and the prisons of Russia and China.

MITT ROMNEY is the likely Republican candidate. In his campaign white paper issued in September 2011, Romney stresses that he sees the world primarily in moral, not material terms. He starts off with American values, then discusses the need to fix the American economy and strengthen the American military. He is not comfortable with the decline of American power. He favors returning to the market-oriented policies of the Reagan era, calling for a Reagan Economic Zone of deepening trade and investment among freedom-loving countries. And he favors expanding the Navy and Air Force and putting an additional aircraft carrier task force in the Middle East.

The principal threats he identifies are the powerful and authoritarian states that stalk the world community.

China is first among them, along with the “broad arc” of terrorism extending from Pakistan to Libya. While acknowledging that force is always the least desirable option, he advocates the use of force before, not after, events erupt in an attack on the United States or its allies. He emphasizes the buildup and maneuvering of force before a crisis in order to deter adversaries from attacking in the first place. He stresses allies, such as Europe, Japan, and South Korea, and friends, such as India and Indonesia. He puts less emphasis on multilateral institutions, which he characterizes as “forums for the tantrums of tyrants.”

Romney clearly has more of a chessboard view. His challenge is going to be to complement it with a jigsaw-puzzle approach that justifies the risks posed by the chess match. How does Romney integrate military pressure and diplomatic vision to offer Iran, North Korea, and their benefactors in Moscow and Beijing a way forward in peace and freedom? It’s not easy to come up with such a vision given the ill will in Tehran and Pyongyang and the lack of will in a war-weary America.

In different times, Ronald Reagan found the right mix. He challenged the Soviet Union to a military contest it could not win while offering Moscow a future of economic inclusion it could not resist. And he rallied the American people, politically paralyzed and tired of war, to distinguish between decline and defeatism and to believe in themselves again.

The Obama-Romney contest will feature a sharp contrast between the chessboard view of the world held by Romney and the jigsaw-puzzle view Obama holds. The challenge for the man who wins the battle will be to find the right mix between the two—because if there isn’t one, our foreign policy will continue to suffer and America’s position in the world will continue to erode. 🌱