Politics & Diplomacy

Pondering Primacy

Richard N. Haass

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GJIA: You recently argued that states give up their sovereignty when they commit acts of genocide, harbor terrorism, or threaten global and national security. Are these the only times intervention is justified, or should the promotion of political reform in strategic regions be added to this list?

HAASS: A lot depends on what you mean by intervention. I do not think that promoting political or economic reform is an appropriate use of armed intervention. The use of military force needs to be reserved for extreme situations. However, I do think we should promote political and economic reform towards openness through other tools, such as incentives, sanctions, economic aid, free trade agreements, and promotion of civil society, because it helps bring about a world that is likely to be more peaceful and stable.

GJIA: Do you see a tradeoff between promoting democracy and dealing with strategically important, non-democratic regimes?

HAASS: In the long run we have to promote democracy and economic openness. We have to take a gradual approach because states can get into trouble if they move too far too fast. However, there will also be those times—and 9/11 may well have been one of them—when we have temporary priorities, like fighting terrorism, and that may mean we have to form certain types of

relationships with some governments that are fairly unsavory. I think you have to be willing to set those priorities, but over the long run you must introduce a pro-democracy dimension to your policy. Moreover, one of the things we are seeing now is that cooperation on counter-terrorism can become the opening wedge of a new relationship. It can actually open up opportunities to do things like advance democracy and economic openness.

GJIA: Democracies often have a more difficult time than non-democracies in consolidating domestic support, especially on controversial issues. What does increasing democratization imply about the future of international relations?

HAASS: Growing democratization on balance is a good thing. There is a lot of evidence that democracies relate pretty well to other democracies. We also just happen to believe in them inherently and existentially in terms of the quality of life and freedoms they deliver. So, if we have to pay a price in terms of increased difficultly navigating the day to day with another country, that seems to me a price worth paying.

Countries have sometimes had to deal with the frustration of, say, our congress vis- -vis our executive branch and the way our constitution distributes treaty power, confirmation power, or the passage of legislation. That hasn't stopped other countries from having close relationships with the United States, and I would say the same thing about us with them.

The United States has all this power, but power is not the same as influence.

We understand that as countries become more democratic certain constituencies inside and outside their governments will have larger degrees of power. We are used to that. For example, we are used to the influence of agricultural lobbies in Western Europe and Japan. We understand what kind of impact they have and how that constrains what the governments can do. It is just a fact of life that we just take into account, and all I can say is those are the good kinds of problems to have. They are much better than the kinds of problems you would have dealing with non-democracies.

GJIA: Regardless of the criteria, who decides when a country is committing (or omitting) actions that justify intervention?

HAASS: This is one of the central questions of international relations today. The answer is that there is no single source of authority or legitimacy. For example, in the late 1990s, when the UN Security Council refused to authorize an intervention in Kosovo, I thought it was the wrong answer, and the United States was right to take the issue to NATO. When the international community refused to act to stop the genocide in Rwanda in the mid-1990s, the United States and other countries were wrong to stand aside and just to let the genocide go forward. I cite these two examples as evidence that the United Nations is not yet at the point where it alone can decide what is legitimate and what is not.

Well then, who decides? Is it the United States or some other government? The answer is that you have to look at the case at hand and you have to try to make a case in the court of international public opinion. I believe you have to try to form as multilateral a response as you can. But the fact is that there is no world government or world supranational authority. So, you have to base your actions on norms. Moreover, when a government like the United States acts, whether in Iraq now or as we did in Afghanistan, or say against some genocide, it is important that they explain why it is they are doing what they are doing in terms of the principles that they are trying to uphold or defend.

These decisions will inevitably be made case by case. So, we may decide that what we did in one situation was necessary, and we may argue against someone else doing it in a situation that they think is analogous. Sometimes you have to be inconsistent in foreign policy. Moreover, just because you may have the right to act doesn't mean that acting is the smartest thing to do. In foreign policy, you always have to ask yourself not simply whether you have the right to do something, but whether it's wise compared to all the other choices and tools available to you.

GJIA: It sounds like you would go along with the UN if it had greater legitimacy, credibility, and capability. How can the UN achieve this?

HAASS: The best way to build up the role of the United Nations is to build greater consensus between and among the major powers. The UN can never be more than the sum of its parts, and if the parts fundamentally disagree, then the UN essentially is precluded from playing a meaningful role. The UN is not an independent entity and it does not have the sovereign personality of a state. So, the best way to build up the role of the UN is not to assign it more people or more money or more power, but to build consensus between its members.

For example, the World Trade Organization is able to play a meaningful role in regulating world trade because there is a consensus among the principal trading states over these rules, not because it has enormous powers. The problem is that we haven't reached that point in other areas of international politics. We simply do not have that kind of consensus about the proper means and ends of foreign policy. So, I think we have to accept a more limited role for the UN during this period. Meanwhile, we should try to build greater consensus, and expand on areas like cooperation against terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and genocide where consensus already exists. The potential for the UN to play a meaningful role will grow accordingly.

GJIA: When you do intervene, for whatever reason, who is responsible for restoring sovereignty at the end of an intervention? Who receives this sovereignty, and might we have to redraw territorial boundaries to establish durable states?

HAASS: There is no one mechanism or model and there are all sorts of examples, from Cambodia to East Timor, Kosovo to Bosnia, and Haiti to post-World War II Germany and Japan. I think a lot depends upon how you got to that point, the scale of the problem, how much international consensus there is to act. Restoring sovereignty tends to be best if it is done multilaterally because it gives it greater legitimacy and acceptability.

In terms of who we restore sovereignty to and how, you can do the sort of thing you did in Afghanistan, where originally you convened a meeting in Germany, which then led six months later to a loya jirga, which included key political figures in Kabul, and down the road you will hopefully have a progressively more open democratic process. In Iraq, we are taking a different, but not totally dissimilar, path.

What I think matters is that you come up with a political process that is representative, seen as legitimate by the vast majority of the people, and increasingly provides avenues and mechanisms for their participation. At some point I believe there should be elections in that process, but not necessary at the beginning. You should also promote civil society and economic opportunity in order to develop a real society. That is the best protection I know against any sort of breakdown of order or over-concentration of power. But this process always has to be tailored in ways that take into account local traditions, local history, and the preferences of the local people.

On the question about redrawing maps, I lean against that. That tends to raise at least as many questions as it purportedly would settle, and you don't want to create one or two new problems in the name of solving one. If you are going to be adding territory to some place, it suggests that you are going to be taking it away from somewhere else. I think the key is less the redrawing of lines as it is trying to reconstitute political and economic life within and across lines. That is where issues of federalism come in. I just don't see us where people were nearly 100 years ago after World War I, when they took out their atlases and started redrawing maps. Unless there was consensus all around, I don't think that is the way to go.

GJIA: There is obvious tension between state sovereignty and globalization, and you have argued that globalization requires regulation. How can we regulate globalization without undermining its benefits?

HAASS: There is some tension between globalization and state sovereignty because many of the phenomena of globalization are transnational flows that cannot be controlled by governments. It is just a fact of life—neither necessarily good nor bad—that there are things that governments cannot control.

On the other hand, governments are not powerless, and they can still do a lot to shape what goes in and out of their borders. What you obviously want to do is get governments to try and restrict the flow of the negatives of globalization—drugs, trafficking in innocent people, and terrorists—but to allow the positive things like the normal flow of trade, services, tourism, and legal migration.

Governments need to work together to do just this because it is beyond the capacity of any single government. You end up needing a lot of cooperation between governments. For example, governments have to set up arrangements so that borders are open for tourism and businessmen and others but closed to criminals and terrorists, or where normal flows of investment take place but hot money flows and laundered money are restricted. In fact, you need to set up networks not just between governments, but also among international organizations, NGOs, and private companies to help manage transnational flows.

GJIA: Related to that, what do you make of post-9/11 tension between providing for homeland security and protecting certain democratic and civil rights?

HAASS: There has obviously got to be a balance between how you promote the rights that make a democracy a democracy and the need to protect against the things that undermine those rights. I actually do not think there is a single right answer. 9/11 sent a message to the leadership and citizenry of this country that we might have to recalibrate this balance. In light of the fact that the kinds of things the terrorists are able and willing to do are so great and dangerous, we may have to slightly constrain or curtail some of our individual liberties or protections in order to get this balance right, but we are not talking about wholesale changes.

The image I would use is one of a scale. We are not switching from fully democratic to non-democratic, but we are slightly adjusting the balance in the direction of greater law enforcement capabilities, slightly more capable filters of our borders, and so forth.

GJIA: Dealing with the same actors repeatedly and on a range of issues is a fundamental part of international relations. This allows actors to negotiate across several issues, but it also raises the possibility that fallout over one issue can spillover. How do you reconcile this with the Bush Administration's approach of assembling "coalitions of the willing to deal with the issue at hand?"

HAASS: Putting together coalitions of the willing, or coalitions of the able and willing, is in some way the natural response to what you have just outlined. We are moving towards a period in history when relationships are more situational; where you are unlikely to have one-dimensional relationships where all the arrows always point in the same direction. We are likely to find ourselves cooperating with a state on some issues, opposing it on other issues, and maybe just talking past one another on a third set of issues.

What that suggests is that normal alliance relationships might not apply because alliances acquire a degree of automaticity and universality that probably will not work in this period of international relations. The normal pattern will increasingly be one where a challenge comes along or is predicted and we put together a coalition of states and others who take a similar view and have some resources to bring to bear to deal with that challenge. Another challenge or opportunity comes along and we will put together a different coalition. So, you end up with shifting coalitions. The challenge for diplomacy is on one hand to make the coalition you put together as inclusive as possible and, on the other hand, when you have your inevitable disagreements, to work against spillover that would adversely affect other areas where cooperation is possible.

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For example, just because we disagree with a certain country on what to do about Saddam Hussein does not mean that we cannot still cooperate on the war on terrorism, in the WTO, or what to do about HIV/AIDS. We want to get to the point where we can disaggregate how we deal with these issues. Otherwise, if we insist that you are either always with us or you can't be with us at all, we will likely find ourselves with very few partners.

GJIA: Is there a concern that too much political capital might be expended on one challenge, alienating people on that issue, and creating spillover? For example, France has said it will veto reconstruction efforts largely because it did not see the war itself as illegitimate.

HAASS: We will see how that works out and, in any case, those two issues are somewhat connected. But I would be surprised if, for example, France suddenly refused to cooperate with us against HIV/AIDS. There is a natural understanding that you cooperate where you can. That said, you are asking a legitimate question because there is always the potential for spillover. Democratic governments may find their choices constrained by their own domestic politics if there is a sense of resentment. So, in individual cases we have to ask ourselves if something is a priority because sometimes you have to be prepared to compromise on some second-order issues if you want to get cooperation on first-order issues. Of course, it is always easier in theory than in practice because there can always be disagreement about what is a first- and second-order issue among the Executive Branch, Congress, and the American public.

GJIA: You said that balancing power politics can be replaced by pooling of power as the number of states that share key ideas about how the world should operate increases. Will these ideas be developed through integration (cooperation, consultation, and compromise) or assimilation into a particular worldview?

HAASS: I don't see this as a case of classic horse-trading. I think there are certain things we should not compromise on. We should not sit down and say a little bit of genocide or just a few chemical or biological weapons are okay. That is ridiculous. I think we should be quite firm about an open trading system, support for democracy, and human rights.

The best thing to do is to get others to see the natural attraction of those ideas. You cannot impose it on them. Other countries have to see the inherent attractiveness of these ideas and see how they are in their own self-interest. I'll return to the WTO as an example: other countries and governments understand why it is in their self-interest to accept certain rules of the road in regulating trade. What we need to do is come up with ideas in other areas that are in everyone's self-interest.

It is often best to come up with some of those ideas in consultation with others, so we don't just sit here in splendid isolation and pronounce. Global climate change, for example, is one place where we need more consultation. Others have come up with the Kyoto idea but we think that it is unacceptable and inherently flawed. There needs to be greater consultation to come up with a scheme in which countries might agree to self-regulate or constrain themselves on behalf of a greater good that they would benefit from.

In order to bring about integration, which is my goal, we have to come up with ideas that may not be universally attractive, but are widely attractive. We have to identify the ideas and institutions around which we can build a critical mass. In more and more dimensions of international life, what we have to do then is try to come to some consensus, and where we can't do that, we have to ask ourselves if we are better off alone, or if we might be better off making certain compromises. That is a question we are going to have ask and answer on an individual basis.

GJIA: We've chosen not to join several international conventions, such as the Kyoto Protocol and the International Criminal Court. To what extent does our not signing these treaties affect our ability to shape international norms?

HAASS: People here would say we did try to shape them. We participated in the drafting of Kyoto and the Rome statute, but at the end of the day we couldn't build a consensus around something we believed in. Or to put it another way, others built a consensus around things we could not sign on to, and we made the decision that we were better off outside those arrangements than we would be inside.

I am hoping the day comes when we, the United States, can come up with a set of norms and arrangements in both these areas, that there will be a post-Kyoto arrangement on global climate change, and that at some point there will be a mechanism for introducing changes into the ICC so our concerns about potential abuse of prosecutorial and judicial power are addressed. The current situation is not ideal for the people who are promoting these institutions or for us. There is also spillover to use the word used earlier. It is one of the things that clearly contributes to friction between the United States and the rest of the world. So, it is in everyone's interest to bridge these differences, and that is what consultations should be focused on

It is not enough to simply find fault [with a treaty]. You have to also say what it would take to fix it.

GJIA: So where do these alternative proposals stand? For example, when can we expect an American response to the Kyoto Protocol?

HAASS: I cannot answer that. That is, as we say, above my pay grade. But it is important when the United States dissents from some principle or arrangement that we don't just say we disagree. When we disagree, it should only come after efforts to try to forge a consensus we could live with, and failing that, I think it is incumbent upon us to come up with an alternative very quickly and to try to build a consensus around that. So I hope that we will come forward with alternatives to Kyoto or a set of amendments to the ICC. To me, the complement to opting out of an international consensus is purporting reasonable ideas around which an alternative consensus has the potential to be built. It is not enough to simply find fault; you have to also say what it

would take to fix it, and try to build a larger consensus around the alternative than around the original.

GJIA: As director of policy planning, you are charged with developing long-term strategy. Do you think the United States has used its supremacy wisely?

HAASS: In some ways that is the central question of the day. The United States has all this power, but power is not the same as influence. The questions are how do we translate our power into something that is lasting and how do we get others to work with us to tackle common challenges, whether it's terrorism or proliferation or disease or promoting free trade.

I fall back on the idea that we ought to be trying to build consensus around certain principles and institutions. We have made some clear progress on trade and democracy, significant progress on the counter-terrorism, and some progress on counter-proliferation. So the answer is, there's a lot of progress to be shown. Are we done? No. There are still big areas of disagreement between us and other countries about the use of force and how to deal with some difficult cases, such as proliferation in North Korea or Iraq or Iran. So we have a ways to go.

It is too soon to answer whether we have used our primacy wisely. In some cases, I would argue we have done well; in other cases, not as wisely as we might have. But it is too soon to draw up a verdict; it is too soon for this administration, which is only slightly more than half- way through this term. It is too soon for the United States: it hasn't even been a decade and a half since the end of the Cold War. I would simply say in some cases we can point to progress, and in some cases we cannot.