**Imperial Restoration?**

**Barack Obama and American Foreign Policy**

Clearly, the empire did strike back at Usama ibn Laden and *al Qa’ida*, but how has the United States, as the lone superpower, fared more generally under President Barack Obama in foreign affairs? Foreign policy may not have been a central issue in the 2012 presidential election but that should not suggest that it is any less vital to the future of the United States than it was on the morning of 9/11, 2001. Generally, election promises of 2008 were met, and perhaps exceeded, but what of new challenges in the shifting landscapes of the Middle East and North Africa, unsettling prospects in Europe, and potential economic tensions in China? Has the *empire of liberty* sustained its precarious claim to international power and leadership or have economic challenges dampened global prospects for leadership and security, and what of the coming four years? Did Barack Obama restore the status and power of the United States or does the shadow of the paradigm of imperial decline still loom over what may be the last superpower? Success or failure in foreign policy is most often judged immediately by most recent events, and here September’s attacks on American embassies, consulates, and missions throughout the Middle East and North Africa, and how the United States reacts to these acts will, accurately or not, go far in assessing Obama’s foreign policy record. But in the broadest terms President Obama produced significant results in his first term, avoided certain imperial temptations, and succeeded in at least preserving the status of the United States as a significant superpower if not achieving the beginning of an imperial restoration.

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**Introduction: From a *Nobel Peace Prize* to the Shores of Tripoli**

Clearly, the empire did strike back at Usama ibn Laden and *al Qa’ida* delivering a series of crippling blows to the leadership of that nefarious organization, but how did the United States, as the lone superpower, fare more generally under President Hussein Barack (II) Obama in foreign affairs? Foreign policy may not have been a central issue in the 2012 presidential election but that should not suggest that it was any less vital to the future of the United States than it was on the morning of 9/11, 2001. Generally, election promises of 2008 were met, and perhaps exceeded, but what of new challenges in the shifting landscapes of the Middle East and North Africa, unsettling prospects in Europe, and potential economic tensions in China? Has the *empire of liberty* sustained its precarious claim to international power and leadership or have economic challenges dampened global prospects for leadership and security, and what of the coming four years? Has Barack Obama restored the status and power of the United States or does the shadow of the paradigm of imperial decline still loom over what may be the last superpower? Success or failure in foreign policy is most often judged immediately by most recent events, and here September’s attacks on American embassies, and consulates throughout the Middle East and North Africa, and how the United States reacts to these acts will, accurately or not, go far in assessing Obama’s foreign policy record, a foreign policy that began with a *Nobel Peace Prize* and concluded this President’s first term with searing questions about an attack on an American mission and the death of an ambassador.

**What Would Reagan Do? And What Reagan Did Not Do**

Often during the 2012 Presidential Election, far too often, Barack Obama’s foreign policy was condemned by Republican Party members either comparing it unfavorably with the foreign policy of former President Ronald Reagan, as if that was the gold standard which it was not in reality, or as “bad” as the foreign policy of former President Jimmy Carter, a policy that was not really all that bad. Reagan himself summed his foreign policy achievements with reference to a dubious military exercise in Grenada, and the completion of a minor treaty involving intermediate range (and size) nuclear weapons in Europe (the *INF Treaty*). He also left out reference to failure in Lebanon, no-action in the Arab-Israeli Conflict and the Iran-Contra Scandal. Carter, on the other hand renegotiated the Panama Canal Treaty to the benefit of American relations with Latin America, finalized the recognition of the People’s Republic of China, and was the first American president to make real progress (though short-lived) in the Arab Israeli Conflict with the *Camp David Accords* which ultimately led to the *Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty*.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Many Americans were at the very least mystified when it was announced that newly elected President Barack Obama had been honored with the *Nobel Peace Prize*, an award many believed Reagan deserved for “winning the Cold War.” Of course this latter assumption began with a dubious premise; it could be said that Reagan, along with President Mikhail Gorbachev, had been part of a broader process that ended the Cold War, but it is not at all clear that any one person “won” it.[[2]](#footnote-2) Indeed, the Nobel honor was unexpected. Obama was less than nine months into his first presidential term and had offered a good deal of promise, but perhaps no single major achievement. The Nobel committee honored Obama for his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation creating a new climate in international politics, especially in reaching out to the Muslim world. It could also be construed that this was a recognition of the end of the United States unilateral policies under George W. Bush as much as an appreciation of any actual achievement on the part of Obama. But the tone, at least, of American foreign policy had changed. In part this was evident with Obama’s Cairo speech that was at once praised in the Islamic world but also condemned in parts of the United States as the beginning of his international “apology tour.”

Of course this was not the only thing that Obama did that Reagan did not. Obama actually ended a war, the long and painful conflict in Iraq and set the stage for ending another war-the longest war in American history in Afghanistan, he negotiated a major arms reduction treaty (*New START*), he was vigorous in his efforts against *al-Qa’ida* resulting in the deaths of several of that organizations leaders including Usama ibn Laden, he led an international effort that brought down Muammar al-Qaddafi of Libya, established a positive personal image for the American presidency in the Arab world, he generally restored more positive relations with key allies and developed a positive image in many of those countries, effectively held his own with the People’s Republic of China and North Korea, and took stern steps to hold the line regarding Iran’s nuclear weapons potential, and he effectively held off an economic collapse that clearly was on the verge of creating a global depression. Indeed, it could be said that Obama earned the Nobel award after the fact, much as he promised he would endeavor to do as president upon accepting the prize in 2009.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Indeed, the challenge to Obama was nothing less than overwhelming. Two wars, a “war on terrorism,” an economic crisis of global proportions, questions of nuclear proliferation, the continuing Arab-Israeli Conflict- a primary of source of regional instability, poor relations with allies, and competitors, and a past policy of unilateralism that had not endeared the United States to anyone. Obama’s approach has been described variously as pragmatic, reactive, or even realist. The president has been described as aloof, but is clearly popular, if only for being the “anti-Bush.” In perhaps the most comprehensive quick-study of Obama’s foreign policy, he has been described as a “progressive pragmatist.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Whatever the title, President Obama produced significant results in his first term, avoided certain imperial temptations, and it could be said succeeded in at least preserving the status of the United States as a significant superpower, if not achieving the beginning of an imperial restoration in contradistinction to the rather short-sighted New York Times’ conclusion that his first term accomplishments in foreign policy were “sparse.”[[5]](#footnote-5) The power and prestige of the United States as a superpower, to say nothing of the legacy of this president, almost certainly will be determined by what can be referred to as the imperial temptation of Barack Obama and his efforts at imperial restoration.[[6]](#footnote-6)

***New START***

One of the more perplexing successes of the Obama Administration involves the issue of nuclear arms reduction, which one would assume would be significant especially given the current issue of nuclear proliferation, and it is perplexing because it was generally a success but did not garnered a good deal of positive recognition. The negotiation, signing, and ratification of *New START* (*Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty*, signed April 8, 2010 by Barack Obama and President Dmitry Medvedev of the Russian Federation, ratified and put into force February 5, 2011 was barely mentioned by either side in the 2012 election and still seems an insignificant event. In fact, it was very significant on several levels. First, it continued the process of reducing the nuclear arsenals of the two largest nuclear powers in the world. Second, it solidified relations between the United States and the Russian Federation. And third, it accentuated the intent of the Obama Administration to be proactive in global efforts to curb nuclear proliferation and reduce existing nuclear arsenals.

The treaty was signed in Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic which was at once significant and symbolic since this was the geographic center of contention between Russia and the United States concerning the prospects for an anti-missile, missile system. The treaty was a practical necessity given the fact that the last major arms reduction treaty between these the two largest nuclear states, *START II* (*Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty*) between the United States and Russia (1993) fell apart when the latter party withdrew from the treaty after the United States withdrew from what is known as the *ABM Treaty* (*Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty*) of 1972 in order to pursue anti-missile system in 2002. In the meantime an interim treaty emerged, *SORT* (*Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty*), or the *Treaty of Moscow* (2003) that called for a mutual reduction of deployable, strategic weapons from 2,200 to 1,700 by 2012. *New START* was to take effect as the provisions of *SORT* ran out calling for further arms reductions to 1,500 weapons for each respective state.

Beyond the practical effects of *New START*, the treaty also held enormous symbolic importance. First, it significantly reduced tensions between Moscow and Washington, D.C. caused by the issue of a proposed anti-missile system and radar system to be placed in the Czech Republic creating the foundation of a positive working-relationship between Obama and Medvedev, a “reset” or “fresh start” of relations following a significant erosion of American-Russian relations under George W. Bush. Second, the treaty set the stage for potential further arms reductions following the 2012 election, something that was heavily hinted at in Obama’s 2013 State of the Union Address.[[7]](#footnote-7) Third, the treaty set a positive tone for the prospects of discussions regarding global arms reduction and limitations on nuclear proliferation, including the problems presented by North Korea and Iran, as Obama put it in Prague these efforts would “…seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.”[[8]](#footnote-8) In this context it might also be politically possible for Obama to push for and win support in the Senate for the *Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty*. And fourth, it was hoped that this treaty would create in Medvedev a working partner in efforts to restrain Iran’s nuclear ambitions.[[9]](#footnote-9) The re-emergence of Vladimir Putin as president may have dampened some of these expectations, but it appears that a follow-up *agreement* to *New START* may, nevertheless, be a very real possibility.

**Avoiding Economic Collapse**

In reference to the long-term economic problems facing the United States Fareed Zakaria probably exaggerated America’s situation by asking “Can America Be Fixed?” His specific complaint concerns the virtual stalemate created by the clash of the Republican and Democratic parties in Congress, and in this his fears are valid.[[10]](#footnote-10) But it should also be noted that despite this considerable political impasse the United States led by Barack Obama dodged a bullet of cataclysmic proportions in doing just enough to avert a global financial/economic collapse. The combined effects of two unfunded wars, an additional campaign against terrorism, questionable and unnecessary tax cuts, a collapse of the mortgage industry caused by virtually unregulated speculation, and initial refusal to recognize the potential enormity of what was happening under the Bush Administration, left the United States teetering on the brink in late 2008, as Obama was elected president, and the repercussions on the global economy hardly did anything to improve a rather dismal appreciation of the United States on the world stage. Indeed, what began as an American crisis soon became a world crisis.[[11]](#footnote-11) Bush did take certain initial steps to stop the bleeding, but it took “major,” and controversial, steps by the Obama Administration in its first months to right the economic/financial ship at home and help with the broader situation abroad.[[12]](#footnote-12) In this context it could be construed that America has been fixed, if only temporarily, which in turn had a beneficial impact on the world.

To forestall the “threat of worse things to come” on the world stage, Obama turned to the newly emerging *G-20* at the 2009 summit meeting in London. At this forum he was able to convince most of the member states to invoke significant stimulus packages, something that had already begun in the United States. The International Monetary Fund was also given additional help. Tighter regulations on financial institutions followed along with encouragement for cooperative efforts beyond simple national preservation. He also signed three free trade agreements in October 2011. Obama’s efforts on this stage was a good sign that the unilateral policy tendencies of the past administration had been replaced by a new spirit of multilateralism and good thing too for this crisis had global potential.

Curiously, again, Obama can be credited with actions that proved far more important than immediately recognized. While the efforts at economic recovery were first and foremost acts of national survival, they also were seen as efforts at staving off what could have been the greatest economic calamity since the 1930s and the first steps towards a world war. It was not immediately apparent that Europe, and the world in general, had forgiven the United States for past policies under Bush and more importantly for setting off the tinder of this economic conflagration, but it was a powerful step for Barack Obama and the United States, “He employed a sense of humility and a consultative style to go along with his supreme self-confidence and his recognition that despite it all, America must still lead.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

**Extricating the United States From Two Wars**

Even as late as the fall of 2010 it appeared that the primary and immediate foreign policy areas for President Obama would involve trade, restoring some semblance of global economic balance, and the endgames in Iraq and Afghanistan. Candidate Obama had suggested a fast withdrawal from Iraq, perhaps within sixteen months; in fact he took nineteen months to get down to 50,000, but this was still seen as impressive.[[14]](#footnote-14) On the one hand, the combat mission in Iraq had been declared as ended in August of 2010, leaving some 50,000 troops in an advisory capacity after having peaked in 2007 with 170,000 troops. By mutual mandate the final American troops (500 in all) walked silently, under cover of darkness, from Iraq into Kuwayt early on the morning of December 16, 2012.[[15]](#footnote-15) In this the Obama Administration seemed to move as quickly as possible to bring a quick final exit, “The Obama Administration does come off as somewhat callous and shortsighted, but it was simply finishing off a job it never wanted to do in the first place.”[[16]](#footnote-16) This had been, after all, “Bush’s war,” and a very unpopular and ill-advised war at that.[[17]](#footnote-17) The major problem remained gaining the upper hand in Afghanistan to begin talking about a clear and timely exit strategy. The nature of the war in that country demanded a complicated game along the Afghan-Pakistani frontier that crossed and re-crossed international boundaries and threatened a whole new level of American intervention, an imperial temptation indeed. Obama’s acceptance of a military surge suggested that the temptation to broaden the Afghan war in order to shorten it in the long history of things might prove irresistible which it may still prove to be. Nevertheless, a military draw-down akin to that in Iraq in August of 2010 in Afghanistan had already begun despite cautionary comments from the Pentagon that insisted that such an occurrence would be more realistic in 2014. Already the longest war in the history of the republic, a short-term solution to Afghanistan has proven as elusive as the capture or killing of *Taliban* and *al-Qa’ida* leaders.[[18]](#footnote-18)

It was not long ago that Afghanistan and the Pakistani frontier seemed to be the vital foreign policy focus for the Obama Administration with mixed evaluations. While it is not likely to be the graveyard of American empire, as suggested by Seth G. Jones, it would certainly be a stretch to begin talking about anything close to a military or political success in this area.[[19]](#footnote-19) Obama’s initial hope to find a way out of Afghanistan, and still put pressure on *al* *Qa’ida*, if not eradicate it as a threat to American security, was to borrow from George W. Bush’s experience in Iraq: a military *surge*. The Afghan *surge* eventually amounted to some 30,000 new troops in a variety of capacities and new leadership. The latter involved the ill-fated appointment of General Stanley McChrystal and finally the designation of General David Petraeus as regional commander in June 2010. With these changes political critics held that the war in

Afghanistan and along the Afghan-Pakistani frontier had undeniably become *Obama’s war*.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Even as General Petraeus took command it was becoming clear that the situation had involved certain complications that made easy or timely solutions difficult if not down-right unlikely. Most importantly the war was morphing into two almost distinct theaters of operation: a battle with local *Taliban* for the political future of Afghanistan; and an attempt to deal with *Taliban* and *al-Qa’ida* and their leaders safely ensconced in the tribal frontier areas including territory in Pakistan. The former had taken on many of the aspects of nation-building rather than a fight against terrorism which was clearly the motivation for the latter campaigns. The efforts to rebuild Afghanistan have been hampered, not just by the remaining *Taliban*, but by official corruption, election irregularities, the growing drug trade, and the tribal nature of the local cultures. There were even suggestions of a rapprochement between the government led by Hamid Karzai and certain elements of the Afghan *Taliban*. Perhaps the most difficult part of the overall equation was the simple fact that an increasingly large amount of the regional focus was in Pakistan where, as Peter Bergen pointed out, “It was difficult for the United States to have a strategy for Pakistan if *Pakistan* didn’t have an effective strategy for Pakistan.”[[21]](#footnote-21) This began to change in 2010 as Pakistanis became less tolerant of the *Taliban* and *al-Qa’ida* in their country and became more tolerant of American drone strikes against *Taliban* and *al-Qa’ida* targets in Pakistan, the number and intensity of which have increased rather dramatically under Obama. Still, the transnational nature of the frontier area and Pakistani sovereignty over much of it have limited efforts to root out elements of the *Taliban* and *al-Qa’ida*, and will almost certainly continue to complicate matters. American relations with Pakistan have to be tended with kid gloves in that it is an invaluable ally of the United States, but also a country that has exhibited sympathy with Islamic militants, one with nuclear weapons.

New tensions were also noted between Obama and the new military commander over how long it might be before realistic expectations could be made about an American withdrawal. Clearly, Obama wanted a timely end beginning in summer of 2011, while Petraeus had mentioned something closer to 2014 or longer. Neither anticipated that by February of 2011 events in North Africa, Tunisia, and Egypt would begin drawing attention away from Southwest Asia, a turn that would culminate with the military intervention in Libya in March. New priorities had created something of a holding or status quo situation for this theater of operations, at least for the time being.

With some degree of prescience or prognosis a commentator on British Forces radio suggested on January 9, 2013 that Hamid Karzai’s visit to Washington, D.C. the following day might prove to be a final turning point in the longest war in American history.[[22]](#footnote-22) It proved to be close to the mark. Not only did Obama finalize an end to the war in Iraq, but just before the actual end of his first term and his second inauguration, he had, it seems, made it clear that the American combat mission in Afghanistan would end in the Spring of 2013 and that only a small contingent of troops would remain in that country by 2014 and those in advisory roles or for the purpose of dealing with a reintroduction of *al-Qa’ida* in Afghanistan. In effect this war was on the verge of ending as well.

**Stalemate in Palestine**

Since President Jimmy Carter, the *Camp David Accords* (1978) and the subsequent *Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty* (1979), the Arab-Israeli Conflict (1948- ) has been a foreign policy priority with every American president except one and this trend certainly continued under Barack Obama.[[23]](#footnote-23) Shortly after his inauguration in 2009 Obama announced the appointment of two *special envoys* accentuating his emphasis on the war in Afghanistan and the Arab-Israeli Conflict. Richard Holbrooke was assigned the first task and held it until his untimely death while George Mitchell was to tackle the latter case with the knowledge that this problem would also be a high priority for the new Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Mitchell gave the assignment his best effort until 2011 when he resigned in frustration over growing impediments to a serious peace initiative. Atop the list of these impediments was the Israeli Government itself and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in particular, whose continued intransigence regarding a peace based on an independent Palestine also created noted coolness with President Obama. Over two separate terms of office as prime minister (1996-1999 and 2009-2013) Netanyahu proved something less of an enthusiastic partner for peace, initially opposing major provisions of the Oslo Agreement, and more recently claiming that the current prospects of an American brokered peace had little chance of success. During both terms he supported continued new settlements in the West Bank area. Netanyahu was correct in one observation, since 2000 the Palestinians have split into two groups: the Palestinian Authority or *al-Fattah* in the West Bank, led by Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), and *Hamas* in the Gaza Strip (elements of *Hamas* still refuse to recognize Israel’s right to exist). The nature of the split between the Palestinians seems to have all but doomed an immediate two-state solution. And clearly a three-state solution is not likely. Obama has also been faced with criticism for not being an unequivocal ally of Israel every time he has questioned the sincerity of Netanyahu. Perhaps worst of all have been other events, the Arab Spring, upheaval in Syria, the attack on the American mission in Benghazi, the issue of nuclear weapons and Iran (and Israel’s veiled threats to do something about that), and Israel’s air-attack on Syria, seem to continually derail attempts to return the peace process to the front burner for the Obama Administration.[[25]](#footnote-25)

The best of intentions have failed several American presidents in attempts to end the longest on-going war today, and may well continue to elude Barack Obama as well. Obama seems to be fully aware that the continuation of this conflict adds enormously to the instability of the entire region and the simple fact that with every moment that passes the issues become more complicated and more deeply entrenched making the prospects for peace that much more complicated. While the Palestinians remain divided and the Netanyahu Government stays in office, Obama will find a peace initiative in the Arab-Israeli Conflict all but impossible.

**The Empire Strikes Back: Obama and *al-Qa’ida[[26]](#footnote-26)***

Whether by boots on the ground in the case of the raid that killed Usama ibn Laden or numerous strikes by *Predator* drones, the *Empire of Liberty* did indeed strike back in the war on terror and did it efficiently and with a bloody vengeance. In the most dramatic of terms, Barack Obama fulfilled his promise to take the war on terror to its instigators; and in doing so weakened the Taliban and almost literally decimated the leadership of *al-Qa’ida*. The down side of these actions was seen in what were essentially unilateral acts, and that, in far too many cases allies were not consulted, and of course the significant of collateral damage from the drone strikes.

***Zero Dark Thirty*: *Operation Neptune Spear*[[27]](#footnote-27)**

The death of Usama ibn Laden as the result of *Operation Neptune Spear* (also known as *Operation* *Geronimo*) in many ways was the high-water mark as a success in foreign policy for Barack Obama. It was the culmination of over ten years of bitter frustration in the war on terrorism that actually dated back beyond 9/11 to 1993 and the first attempt to destroy the twin towers. More importantly it was one of a series of productive efforts against terrorists in *al-Qa’ida* and the Taliban. It has been said that in his first term as President of the United States, Obama virtually decimated the leadership of *al-Qa’ida*.[[28]](#footnote-28) Along with Usama ibn Laden there is a long list of *al-Qa’ida* and Taliban leaders and lieutenants killed under Obama’s watch: Anwar al-Awlaki (leader of *al-Qa’ida* in the Arabian Peninsula-AQAP), Abu Haf al-Shahri (*al-Qa’ida* chief of Pakistani operations), ‘Atiya ‘Abd al-Rahman (a deputy leader of *al-Qa’ida*), Ilyas Kashmiri (an *al-Qa’ida* commander in Pakistan), Ammar al’Wa’ili, Abu Ali al Harithi, Ali Saleh Farhan (all *al-Qa’ida* commanders in Yemen, Harun Fazul (senior leader of *al-Qa’ida* in East Africa-AQEA), ‘Abdullah Sa’id and Saleh al-Somali (*al-Qa’ida* operational commanders in Pakistan), Hussein al-Yemani (*al-Qa’ida* operative in Pakistan), Abu Ayyub al-Masri and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi (*al-Qa’ida* leaders in Iraq), Sheik Saeed al-Masri (then *al-Qa’ida* number three commander), Hamza al-Jawfi (*al-Qa’ida* commander in Pakistan), Baitullah Mahsud (*Tehrik i-Taliban* commander in Pakistan), Muhammad Haqqani (*Haqqani* network commander), Qari Zafar (*Lashkar-i Jhangvi* leader), and Dulmatin (*al-Qa’ida* in Indonesia) among others killed or captured. Jake Tapper of *ABC News* referring to Senator John McCain and Rudy Giuliani warnings that electing Obama in 2008 would put the United States on the defensive in the war on terror said “If this is defense, what does offense look like?” Still, there has been a general conclusion that by the time Usama ibn Laden and Anwar Awlaki were killed these events had become less important than possible stability in Afghanistan and positive relations with Pakistan, but this does not diminish the overall intensity and symbolic value of Obama’s efforts against terrorists which have been substantial.

There is not room in this paper to detail the manhunt and final killing of Usama ibn Laden but the event is of such importance that brief summary is necessary.[[29]](#footnote-29) Following the failure of the Tora Bora campaign, George W. Bush finally declared that getting Usama ibn Laden had lost its vital importance. President Obama had never been convinced of this, and made this a priority. When American intelligence had a breakthrough that seemed to give a positive location for the *al-Qa’ida* leader it was a surprise and presented a series of potential problems. He had been living in the Pakistani town of Abbottabad for some five years.[[30]](#footnote-30) It is unlikely that Pakistani intelligence had no knowledge of this which set the stage for other problems; should Pakistan be given a heads up that an American strike of some kind was coming, and if such a warning was given would it leak to the intended target? Relations with Pakistan would have to take a back seat to the overriding importance of the capture or death of Usama bin Laden. Should it be a drone strike, or a ground operation? Should it be attempted at all given some uncertainties about the intelligence, and the fact that it would likely strain relations with Pakistan? Would the effort inflame the Islamic world and cause a great backlash? Obama made it clear that in the end it would be his decisions. The first issue had already been decided; Obama had demanded “Here’s the deal. I want this hunt for Osama bin Laden and al-Zawahiri to come to the front of the line.”[[31]](#footnote-31) The hunt had never really been abandoned; Obama had just made sure that the game was afoot. But could Usama ibn Laden be found, and if he was found would action take the form of a capture, or killing, and then whether by drone strike or boots on the ground?

The hunt for Usama ibn Laden involved an intelligence effort that spanned many years and three presidential administrations, it was a “…steady, patient, unremarkable effort,” and a “…triumph of bureaucratic intelligence gathering and analysis.”[[32]](#footnote-32) The essential breaks in the search was the identification of ibn Laden’s courier which in turn led to the discovery of an inexplicable compound near Abbottabad in Pakistan that was eventually determined to house a tall thin man who was seen walking daily around the house and came to known as the “Pacer;” in time it was believed to be Usama ibn Ladin. The leader of *al-Qa’ida* was not hiding away in a cave somewhere in the inhospitable and rugged mountains between Afghanistan and Pakistan, but in a large house, near a Pakistani military academy, and pretty much in plain sight.

The real question was not whether some action would be taken, but how it should be done. Four broad options were an air strike of some sort, something of a surgical drone strike, the insertion of a Special Operations Force, or some kind of joint operation with the Pakistanis. The first option included the possibility of a heavy bombing of the compound with a B-2, while the second might involve a new type of ordinance to be delivered by a drone which was very selective but offered one shot.[[33]](#footnote-33) Both were simple enough but neither could assure success and there would be collateral damage. The third option would take some planning, and offered a host of possible complications, but could in the end yield a clear determination of success or failure, and this was vital. The first three options would not involve the Pakistanis, nor would they be warned. The fourth option of a cooperative effort was in fact dumped because of fear of a leak either in Pakistan’s intelligence branch or the army. The possibility of landing a small Special Operations team would be done either with a CIA team or a military operation that would use rangers or Navy SEALS. But this latter option also carried with it an ominous cloud; a similar action in the spring of 1980 that aimed at a military rescue of hostages in Tehran had gone terribly wrong, and that must not happen here.[[34]](#footnote-34) In the end the Special Operations insertion, so-called the *McRaven Option*, was adopted and was to be implemented on May 1, 2011 (delayed one day because of weather) as *Operation Neptune Spear*: SEAL Team Six was chosen to be landed at the compound by two modified, stealth Black Hawk helicopters with three much larger Chinook helicopters providing backup forces and additional options for extraction, which proved necessary.[[35]](#footnote-35) One stealth *Black Hawk* was forced to crash-land (and was later destroyed for security reasons) in the compound without casualties and the operation was completed. Usama ibn Laden was identified and terminated with extreme prejudice; his body was extracted with the Seal team (and later given a formal Muslim burial but at sea). The operation was viewed by the president and members of the National Security Council in the basement of the White House. Not only was Usama ibn Laden killed ending the longest and greatest manhunt in the history of American foreign policy, but a significant trove of intelligence was also taken from his home.[[36]](#footnote-36) And contrary to some suggestions that Usama ibn Laden was not important anymore, documents, hard drives and other intelligence seized in Abbottabad proved quite the opposite, “…bin Laden had not been the isolated, irrelevant figure some said he had become, but rather, had been actively steering his organization from his hiding place.[[37]](#footnote-37) Again, a major foreign policy achievement based on clear initiative and decisiveness, and not entirely without risk. The raid has been described as Obama’s “…signature accomplishment, the product of a bold operation that Obama specifically ordered. That decision took considerable courage, given the risks involved and the huge political cost to him personally if the operation had failed.”[[38]](#footnote-38) At 11:35 p.m. President Barack Obama presented a prepared televised statement that began, “Good evening. Tonight, I can report to the American people and the world that the United States has conducted an operation that killed Osama bin Laden, the leader of al Qaeda, and a terrorist who is responsible for the murder of thousands of innocent men, women, and children.”[[39]](#footnote-39)

Fallout with Pakistan was serious as expected but receded somewhat and rather quickly. After all, as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had concluded, the relationship had hardly been based on long friendship or trust but rather simply on mutual need, and as such could afford some embarrassment.[[40]](#footnote-40) It is said that Pakistan’s initial reaction to the raid was “shock;” that it had happened at all, that the United States had not informed Pakistan or asked their ally to be part of the operation, and shock and great embarrassment to the Pakistani military that such a raid could have taken place effectively without its notice. Nevertheless, congratulations were offered by certain Pakistani generals for finally getting ibn Laden.[[41]](#footnote-41) America’s relationship with Pakistan remained tenuous, because of the action and Obama’s drone policy, but it survived out of common necessity.

**Attack of the Drones[[42]](#footnote-42)**

As President Obama’s first term came to an end two foreign policy issues seemed to crowd the headlines: Benghazi, and confirmation hearings for new cabinet appointments. Another issue had been smoldering for some time but had yet to hit the fan. Questions about the use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, UAVs or more popularly drones (*Predators*, *Reapers*, *Global Hawks*, and others), were becoming more numerous and pointing especially with the approach of Senate confirmation hearings for a new CIA Director with the nomination of John O. Brennan.[[43]](#footnote-43) The discussion changed dramatically on Monday, February 4 when Michael Isikoff of *NBC News* obtained a Department of Justice White paper on the use of drones, with focus on when they could be used against an American national. An ACLU suit against the Federal government was also announced regarding the killing of an American born *al-Qa’ida* leader in Yemen, Anwar al-Awlaki. For the remainder of the week the subject of drones seemed to be the next issue that might define Obama’s foreign policy. Ironically, the immediate issues returned to a smolder by week’s end when the full DOJ policy document was released to Congress.[[44]](#footnote-44) Many questions erupted from Congress, especially upset about transparency and the fact that the administrations drone policy was not available to it, and the question of congressional oversight of the policy itself, the media, suggesting an administration cover-up, and certain members of the public questioning the apparent summary execution of an American citizen.

Granted there were significant reasons for some concern over the use of drones. At the top of the list was the generally held conclusion that the drone had become the weapon of choice in the fight against terrorism for the Obama Administration and that the number of drone strikes had increased dramatically under Obama with something of an alarming rise in the amount of collateral damage that went with them. The legality of their use had not been a major issue until the death of al-Awlaki which added certain constitutional concerns over individual rights, but was suddenly another area of worry.

Regular use of drones began under George W. Bush in 2004 but increased substantially under Barack Obama. Since that time there have been over 300 drone strikes, only 50 of them ordered by Bush. This is explained largely by new technology. The drone was something relatively new ten years ago, and have become more sophisticated, accurate, and numerous (from 50 to 7,500) since then. They are more precise, and cheaper than a cruise missile, and they eliminate the risk of an American casualty in a conventional air strike. Above all, they offer an alternative to boots on the ground. The downside has been the alarmingly high ratio of civilians killed in ratio to the killing of suspected terrorists, whether they be *Taliban* in Pakistan or *al-Qa’ida* in Pakistan or Yemen. Numbers vary, but the general figure for deaths by drone strikes is estimated at over 3,000 while only a quarter of that number have been enemy combatants. One figure claims that only one person out of 50 killed would be accurately identified as a true terrorist target (a horrifying 98% ratio of civilian deaths). Obviously this has produced a public relations nightmare in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen. Accuracy is getting better and the alternatives are hardly endearing to an American public. As the preferred *weapon of choice* in Obama’s war on terror, the use of drones has been characterized as either *personality strikes* in isolated cases where the personal identity of the target is clear, or *signature strikes* where precise identity is not made but the target is an armed hostile. The latter may have become the “hallmark” of Obama’s drone policy, but it was a *personality strike* that was at the center of a firestorm in early February.[[45]](#footnote-45)

On September 30, 2011, Anwar al-Awlaki, an American by birth, but a newly promoted “head” of *al-Qa’ida* in Yemen was targeted in a *personality strike* by a drone. It was a major success in efforts to decapitate *al-Qa’ida* and seemed particularly important in the wake of the death of Usama ibn Laden earlier in the year. The fact that al-Awlaki was American-born inspired questions about legality that strangely had rarely been asked since 2004. As a weapon of war did the drone demand some kind of additional justification beyond that which applied to a cruise missile, air strike by a piloted aircraft, or even a raid by a team of SEALs?[[46]](#footnote-46) In fact these were among questions that led the Obama Administration to try to outline something close to a legal rationale for the use of drones (potentially against an American national abroad) in a broader document that was summarized in the one produced by Isikoff in February. That rationale presented a series of necessary pre-conditions: that the target be determined by an *informed high-level official* as a *ranking figure in al-Qa’ida* (or the *Taliban*), who *posed an imminent threat to the United States* in a scenario *where capture was not feasible* and *was done according to laws of war principles*. The statement offered abundant areas for question, not the least of which was the meaning of *imminent* a word with broad meaning since the days leading up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The entire controversy seemed to come down on the head of John O. Brennan in his confirmation hearing of Thursday, February 7.

The timing of the Brennan confirmation proved curious; it presented the perfect opportunity for Senate members on the confirmation panel to critique the president’s drone policy through his nominee. After all, Brennan was considered a major architect of broad use of the drone in the CIA and was called “Dr. Drone” by one critic abroad.[[47]](#footnote-47) In fact, Brennan had been a long-time employee in the CIA going back beyond George W. Bush (some 25 years), and was considered a dependable counter-terrorism advisor by President Obama though something of a Bush hold-over. He did support the idea that the CIA should retain control over drone application rather than the Pentagon which caused some issues with then Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, but it is not all that clear that he was unquestioning champion of the drone policy. In his testimony, Brennan noted that the use of drones has been “very disciplined and very judicious” as a “last resort.” He confirmed that detaining a terrorist for questioning would be the optimum circumstance, but was not always possible.[[48]](#footnote-48) Senator Dianne Feinstein, D-California, pointedly used the hearing to emphasize that the Justice Department had yet to give Congress eight Office of Legal Counsel opinions on the legal rationale for deadly strikes utilizing drones, a matter that was settled, more or less, by the end of the day when the full document was given to Congress. Clearly, the Senate, and Congress in general, wanted some increased transparency on this issue if not some degree of oversight.

In many ways queries about legality are strangely belated given the incredible powers granted the Executive Branch since 1993 in the name of national security and what became the *war on terror*. Sadly, as a part of this broader exercise, legal issues surrounding the use of drone seems perhaps already moot. Truth be told, following two acts of terror, the abortive first attempt to destroy the World Trade Center (1993) and the attack on the barracks in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia (1996), that had been associated with Usama ibn Laden and *al-Qa’ida* Congress granted expansive powers to the president via *The Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act* (1996) which authorized the president to “…use all necessary means, including covert action and military force, to disrupt, dismantle and destroy international infrastructures used by international terrorists, including overseas terrorist training facilities and safe havens.”[[49]](#footnote-49) The act granted legal authority for President William Jefferson Clinton to launch two cruise missile strikes following two more terrorist attacks-a synchronized effort against American embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salam, Tanzania in 1998 both associated with Usama ibn Laden and *al-Qa’ida*, one against what was thought to be an *al-Qa’ida* unit outside the city of Khartoum in the Sudan, the other targeted what was believed to be the location of Usama ibn Laden himself in Khost, Afghanistan. The former was probably based on bad intelligence; the latter was a famous near miss. At the time no one knew the tragic significance of the latter miss, but no one questioned the legality of the actions. Following an attack on the USS *Cole* in Aden in 2000, and of course the events of 9/11/2001, clearly the work of Usama ibn Laden and *al-Qa’ida*, Congress again acted with the *USA Patriot Act* (October 26, 2001), *The Authorization for the Use of Military Force* (September 14, 2001), and the invasion of Afghanistan. President Bush, in his *State of the Union Address* of 2002, called for the *Bush Doctrine* including his notion of preventive war that, though very suspect, was never challenged even after the ill-advised invasion of Iraq in 2003. *The Homeland Security Act* (November 25, 2002) also effectively enhanced executive power. When Congress voted to allow the invasion of Iraq, the *Iraq Resolution* or the *Iraq War Resolution*-formally the *Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002* (October 16, 2002) yet another layer of executive power was granted to the Bush Administration. At this point to question the legality of a simple technical innovation in warfare given is hypocrisy at its limits. The necessary fact of the matter is that the 1996 *Anti-terrorism Act* had effectively already given a legal nod to drone attacks by referring to “all necessary means.”

Despite this, it seems that President Obama has never favored an unrestricted power to use drones without limitation or for every case scenario. Curiously, Obama made a pointed reference to this on The Daily Show with Jon Stewart on October 18, 2012, “…one of the things we’ve got to do is put a legal architecture in place, and we need Congressional help in order to do that, to make sure that not only am I reined in but any president’s reined in in terms of some of the decisions we’re making.”[[50]](#footnote-50) Concern over an unintended presidential precedent was also voiced by Obama in his reluctance to leave an “amorphous” military power to his successors.[[51]](#footnote-51)

**The Challenge of the *Arab Spring*: From Cairo to Benghazi**

History has proven that there will always be a foreign policy challenge that was not anticipated and proves to be a major or significant event.[[52]](#footnote-52) What has come to be called the *Arab Spring*, a series of popular risings against autocratic regimes from Tunisia in North Africa to Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, the Persian Gulf, across Syria and even Iraq and Iran, surprised the world. It was particularly interesting given the broad and cross-national use of modern communication technology. It caused changes in government in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, and began a civil conflict in Syria that threatens the ruling regime of Bashar al-Assad.[[53]](#footnote-53) The movement began with the dramatic symbolic self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi on December 17 2010 in protest of the authoritarian rule of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. By January 2011 the Ben Ali regime was at an end, and communications by e-mail and cell phones were already spreading throughout North Africa and the Middle East. Anti-government demonstrations erupted in Libya igniting civil conflict, and in Egypt pressuring a change in government.

Depending upon particular political point of view, praise or blame has been attached to President Obama for what would occur. On June 4, 2009 Obama gave a major speech in Cairo, Egypt. It was intended as an attempt to bridge perceived differences between the West, especially the United States, and the Islamic world; it proved somewhat unsettling and therefore prescient in its support for constructive change in the region. Whether this speech can be cited as the inspiration for the Arab Spring or condemned for the same thing is not clear. Nor is it at all clear that the president anticipated what would soon follow. The Obama Administration was as surprised as any other government as the full impact of the Arab Spring unfolded. At once voicing support for human rights, and constitutional liberty and some support for the fall of certain regimes, there were also concerns about what would follow and how these events would pan out. Initially, there were differences of opinion about the Egyptian question: what would be the nature of a succeeding government and how to react to the fall of a stalwart pro-American ally in President Hosni Mubarak? There was a great deal of shuffling of diplomatic feet. Moreover, in Egypt , the elections that did take place did not result in the election of someone particularly favorable to American interests: Mohammed Morsi, a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood. Potentially difficult situations developed in Oman, Bahrayn and Saudi Arabia as well. But clearly the most dramatic concerns involved Libya and Syria.

**Libya**

The case of the uprising in Libya deserves some consideration given the significant nature of an eventual international intervention and the final fall of Colonel Muammar al-Qaddafi. By any estimation, the intervention and uprising was a success, but not without consequences that would threaten the reelection of President Obama. Obama and the United States became major players in a multilateral attempt to preclude a humanitarian disaster, but also to help end one of the most heinous regimes in North Africa.[[54]](#footnote-54)

As the political situation in Libya deteriorated with government forces strengthening their positions throughout the country, Muammar al-Qaddafi vowed merciless revenge against any anti-government protestors especially in Benghazi. A humanitarian disaster of enormous proportions seemed imminent moving numerous Western governments to support the creation of a no-fly zone in parts of Libya to negate the efforts of Qaddafi’s air force against the opposition, and to press the United Nations’ Security Council to consider action. The result was *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973* which warned Qaddafi of dire consequences if he did not back down. The resolution demanded an immediate cease fire emphasizing the necessity to put an end to all attacks that threatened civilians which could be construed as “crimes against humanity, it imposed a ban on all flights in the country’s airspace, a *no-fly zone* and tightened general sanctions against Qaddafi and his supporters. The vote (March 17, 2011) carried with 10 states favoring the resolution and no negative votes (five countries abstained: Brazil, China, Germany, India, and the Russian Federation). The resolution authorized all Member States to take action nationally or through regional organizations to take necessary measures to protect civilians under threat of attack in Libya including Benghazi, but excluded a foreign occupation force of any kind. Qaddafi immediately called for a cease-fire and subsequently renewed his offensive against rebels in Benghazi which in turn invoked the beginning of an air campaign by the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, the moral support of the Arab League, and finally the general commitment of NATO. The American reference to the action is *Operation* *Odyssey Dawn*, the United Kingdom has called it *Operation Ellamy*, France *Operation Harmmattan*, Canada *Operation Mobile*, and the United Nations *Operation Unified Protector*.

There is little doubt that the resolution and combined air campaign prevented what would have certainly been a humanitarian catastrophe. But even during the early implementation of the campaign questions emerged as to whether it would be enough to force Qaddafi to step down as national leader or whether that was an intended goal. Moreover, questions were asked as to the future of a Libya without Qaddafi, the nature of the rebels who might inherit the country. Was it a battle between an autocratic leader and democratic forces or simply a power-play amongst tribal forces.[[55]](#footnote-55)

Domestic voices in the United States, many with a clear partisan agenda, questioned President Obama’s decision to involve the United States in yet another conflict in the Islamic world especially given his campaign rhetoric of 2008 regarding the question of war. Obama attempted to assuage critics by stressing limited involvement and intentions as part of a clear international coalition in which the United States would lead only initially. President Obama made his case for the intervention in a nationally televised speech at the National Defense College in Washington, D.C. on March 28 in which he emphasized four major points: the primary motivation for the intervention was to prevent an humanitarian disaster, that the intervention was part of an international coalition, that the intervention was limited in scope, and that it was not intended to cause regime change. In the first case Obama stressed that the action was “…to stop the killing” and prevent “…a massacre that would have reverberated across the region and stained the conscience of the world.” In the second and third cases he reiterated time and again the nature of the operation as limited a humanitarian effort by an international coalition which would assume command in the form of NATO on March 30, and limited to support of a no-fly zone, some air to ground strikes, reconnaissance and intelligence.[[56]](#footnote-56) In the final case he rejected the idea that the intervention aimed at overthrowing Qaddafi, though he suggested that this might be a collateral outcome, “It may not happen overnight, as a badly weakened Qaddafi tries desperately to hang on to power…but it should be clear to those around Qaddafi and to every Libyan that history is not on Qaddafi’s side.” Inevitably, another question emerged, whether Obama acted in a manner consistent with the Constitution. By attempting to act in a limited fashion, Obama had skirted the imperial temptation, by the slightest of degrees in several cases but was left open to other questions. Obama offered American intelligence to allies in the UN operation, and launched some 110 *Tomahwk* cruise missiles. NATO finally assumed the role of mission leader by the end of March 2011, with the caveat that American forces would still play a prominent role in the operation. The phrased that was used to characterize a “limited” involvement by the United States: to lead from behind, hardly gave due credit to the president in allied support, supporting the initial UN resolution and implementing it. But the larger question remained as to the nature of the mission itself; was it purely humanitarian, to prevent a humanitarian disaster, or political, to actually remove Qaddafi from power? In the end this determination will have much to do with whether Obama can avoid imperial temptation by way of a broader military intervention. Of course in the end the intervention proved to be inarguably a factor in the fall of the Qaddafi regime which came to a final end with his death outside of the town of Sirte at the hands of Libyan rebels on October 20, 2011.

Another facet of the imperial temptation concerns presidential tendencies to act first and consult, meaning here the obtaining of Congressional authorization, Congress later, this is especially critical when it involves military intervention like the recent case with Libya. To date President Obama has not sought congressional authorization for the military action in Libya via a congressional resolution or act, or a formal declaration of war, nor has he overtly enacted the *War Powers Act* (*Resolution*). He did meet with a bipartisan collection of eighteen members of Congress from both houses to announce his intention to support *United Nations Resolution 1973* in what he described as a limited commitment, but this hardly took the form of a request for authorization.

While the constitutional waters on this subject have been badly muddied by a host of presidents (and in some cases the complacency or even complicity of Congress) the facts are fairly simple, and the Constitution and the intent of the framers is abundantly clear. Congress was to have the *war power*, the authority to *declare* war (Article I, Section 8). And while the president was granted powers as *commander in chief*, again the Constitution was clear that this would accrue only after Congress had called the armed forces into service (Article II, Section 2). The word *declare* was inserted to replace the word *make* in the *Committee of Detail* at the Constitutional Convention in 1787 to allow the president authority to react to an attack on the United States, but the bottom line was that the power to initiate hostilities was too important and potentially dangerous to be given to one person. According to the Constitution, then, Obama should have not only consulted with Congress but waited for its authorization to act in accordance with the United Nations’ resolution.[[57]](#footnote-57) Neither did he invoke the *War Powers Act* (*Resolution*) by which he could have acted for sixty days following a simple declaration of an emergency and a message to Congress that such an emergency existed and he was imposing that act. At the end of sixty days an additional thirty days could be acquired by again a simple message to Congress. At the end of this time, however, Congress would then be required to act by resolution or declaration of war.[[58]](#footnote-58) Nor should this fall under any interpretation of presidential prerogative that would suggest a form of extraordinary emergency power beyond the limitations of the Constitution akin to John Locke’s notion of *absolute* or *royal* prerogative.[[59]](#footnote-59) And it certainly would not be justified by appeal to the actions of earlier presidents according to presidential precedent.[[60]](#footnote-60)

In its early stages the Libyan intervention is somewhat reminiscent of President Clinton’s involvement with Yugoslavia (today the Serb Republic) concerning *ethnic cleansing* in the province of Kosovo in 1999 and usually referred to as either the Kosovo War or the Kosovo Conflict (Clinton, no doubt, preferred the latter reference). Both dealt with humanitarian issues, both were limited to air campaigns (for the most part), and both came with no serious Congressional authorization. Congress was forgiving of Clinton’s action largely because of public opinion, the fact that there were no allied casualties but ultimately because the policy worked, with the added bonus that in the end President Slobodan Milosevic was forced from power (2000) and eventually handed over to The Hague to be tried for war crimes. Clinton had failed to gain support from the United Nations and appealed to NATO and the *Geneva Convention on Genocide* (1948) instead. Obama could at least claim partnership in a United Nations operation, as well as support from NATO, and no doubt if Obama’s policy assists in the eventual demise of Qaddafi Congress will again be forgiving.[[61]](#footnote-61)

There is an anecdote, no doubt of apocryphal origins, involving President Theodore Roosevelt and his Secretary of State, John Hay, as the president considered sending the Mediterranean and South Atlantic naval squadrons to Tangier, Morocco in 1904. When Hay cautioned Roosevelt that such an act might be illegal the president replied “Why spoil the beauty of the thing with legality.”[[62]](#footnote-62) Whether factual or not, the sentiment has been a common one with far too many presidents.

At least in this sense, the question of constitutionality, President Obama did indeed succumb to an imperial temptation. His intentions were at the very least benign and quite possibly noble, and the outcome may yet prove beneficial, but that does not excuse circumvention of constitutional law, and given this president’s extensive legal background if not his campaign rhetoric in 2007-2008, he should have known better.[[63]](#footnote-63) In this case, the beauty of the thing would have been far better appreciated with strict legality. But the world was rid of an abdominal figure, with limited American cost, some embellishment of the United States abroad, and limited damage to constitutional niceties. And a new government came to power that could actually be described as constitutional, if not democratic. But also a government that would take time to establish stability across a country that had gone through a major civil conflict where groups armed with weapons from the Qaddafi arsenal would still need to be reined in; and clearly some of these groups might prove dangerous.

**Syria**

Despite what were obvious cosmetic attempts to alter the image of the government of Hafez al-Assad by simply trading in military fatigues for well-tailored European suits, the family regime in Syria was no less reprehensible than that of Qaddafi in Libya, and this was not to change when Bashar al-Assad came to power in 2000. But in the case of al-Assad, Syria has some regional political support in Iran, *Hezbollah*, and the Russian Federation; it also has enemies in Israel and to some extent elements in Iraq. As far as the United States and many European partners are concerned Qaddafi’s relative political isolation made intervention much simpler. Which is why the internal Syrian conflict drags on month after bloody month and why outside support for the rebels is limited; the identity and political intentions of these rebels is also a contributing factor. It is quite possible elements of *al-Qa’ida* have already moved into Syria, and al-Assad’s connections with Iran and *Hezbollah* complicate the issue, as does the arsenal of chemical weapons held by the Syrian regime. The nature of a Western intervention or whether such a scenario is possible had created serious questions for the Obama Administration. Senator John McCain (R., Arizona), for one, made this a significant part of his criticism of Obama during the 2012 election and since then. It is not likely that Bashar al-Assad will survive in power, but for the time being political expediency will limit the Obama Administration to rhetorical support for human rights and liberties, with stern warnings about chemical weapons in place of arms or possible intervention. More subtle efforts to convince al-Assad to step down will certainly take place (or continue), but the end of this regime seems to be in the hands of the Syrian people in a very painful struggle. This may eventually favor certain radical elements in Syria, but for the time being that may be unavoidable though in the long-term it may prove costly.

**The Benghazi Affair**

One of the expected results of the *Arab Spring* was the possibility of increased political instability through the region, an accepted trade-off for political progress something strongly urged in Obama’s Cairo speech, and clearly this did occur but in ways that could not have been imagined. Again the unexpected occurred in September 2012 when a *YouTube* presentation of a distasteful anti-Islam video went viral resulting in rampant anti-Western demonstrations throughout the Muslim world. In a number of cases embassies and related offices were attacked, including the American Embassy in Cairo. Initially it was reported that a similarly inspired demonstration had occurred in Benghazi, Libya on September 11 resulting in the death of the American Ambassador to Libya and three other American nationals. It soon became painfully clear that the attack was the result of one of the armed groups that had emerged following the fall of Qaddafi. Confusion and misstatements regarding the nature of the attack and the possible identity of the attackers quickly became a political issue. On September 15, Susan Rice, Ambassador to the United Nations, made a statement based on talking points given her by American intelligence that described the incident as part of the general demonstrations against the video in the region, which proved not to be the case. Critical comments followed demanding to know why no mention of a terrorist act were made, suggesting a political cover-up in an election year and incompetence on the part of the UN Ambassador. President Obama, himself, was denigrated for similar omissions in his Rose Garden remarks following the original event which were unfounded given his clear identification of the attackers as terrorists. As one would expect, a political firestorm resulted. Leading the attack were senators Lindsay Graham (R-South Carolina) and John McCain who would carry their criticism over to Senate confirmation hearings for Secretary of Defense, CIA Director and Secretary of State, the latter involving Rice who finally withdrew her name from consideration. Benghazi became a rallying point for criticism of Obama’s foreign policy during the election and still begs for a clearer statement of what actually happened and why. Retiring Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton defended the Department of State and Susan Rice by taking full responsibility for the incident before a Senate panel but noted that the vital point after the fact was the identification of the attackers and efforts to bring them to justice. Still, in questioning Secretary Clinton before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on January 23, 2013, Senator Rand Paul (R-Kentucky) referred the to attack at Benghazi as the “worst tragedy since 9/11.” Presumably Senator Paul had forgotten Iraq and numerous domestic tragedies. Clarity (something that is all too often rare in foreign affairs) in the description of what happened at Benghazi remains an issue, but its significance is itself dubious as noted rather dramatically by Secretary Clinton,

With all due respect, the fact is that we had four dead Americans…Was it

because of a protest, or was it because of guys out for a walk one night who

decided they’d go kill some Americans? What difference, at this point, does

it make? It is our job to figure out what happened and do everything we can

to prevent it from ever happening again.[[64]](#footnote-64)

Political posturing aside, some facts, some of them uncomfortable, have since been made known, or at least suggested. First of all embassies, consulates and other minor offices utilized as part of a country’s ambassadorial and consular apparatus are not designed to be fortresses. They do not all have a U.S. Marine Corps guard or at least one intended for a significant military defense of the compound, that is the responsibility of the host country. Even so, the State Department had recently made formal requests for additional funds from Congress to augment security for diplomatic and consular offices abroad which were summarily denied, in some cases by the very people who proved most critical of the State Department, Clinton and Rice. And put simply, despite numerous warnings that September 11, 2012 might be the focal point of dramatic anti-American activity in the Muslim World; sufficient resources were not available for every embassy or consulate. Actually, even in the case of a formidable incursion of the embassy grounds in Cairo, security proved ample in every case except the actual protection of the American ambassador who was in Benghazi. Here it should be noted that the offices in Benghazi did not constitute an embassy or a consulate, they were secondary mission offices for the occasional use of the ambassador and other diplomatic staff and therefore would not have been expected to have the limited security of the embassy or consulate, and indeed did not. In fact, American forces were alerted to the Benghazi situation and reacted to it in a timely fashion, and successfully protected and extracted Americans found there, escorting them to the Benghazi airport where they (and the ambassador’s body) were flown safely out of the country early the next morning. They could not immediately locate the ambassador and proved too late to prevent the death of the ambassador and his meager security team.[[65]](#footnote-65) The primary blame rested with the nature of the office, and the other vital fact that the new government in Libya was not yet prepared to offer normal services to foreign missions, or its own security, truth be known. Another and a very uncomfortable part of the affair involved the American Ambassador, J. Christopher Stevens who was a capable, very well liked governmental servant who had quickly made his posting his own. He was knowledgeable about the country, its local cultures, its immediate problems; he was fluent in the national language including some local dialects, and was very comfortable in his charge, perhaps too comfortable. Stevens was also described as a “cowboy,” that is a diplomat that often did not take proper security precautions because he believed they were not necessary. With only three personal security guards beyond the capital and main embassy, at a dangerous time, Stevens was in an untenable position. How the attackers knew of this or anticipated this instance of vulnerability should be the real issue, that and their identity.

In the final analysis it may be seen that fault did not lie with the State Department, Ambassador Stevens, or the Libyan government; unexpected opportunity for a radical group was realized and acted upon. In all probability, a so-called reinforced Marine guard may not have proven enough to prevent this tragedy given that an alerted reinforced security team that did arrive was forced to stand up to heavy fire and withdrew with Americans from the mission under their protection, but such a guard would not have been normal, even on this particular date.

Ultimately, the full effect of the *Arab Spring* is likely to prove beneficial for the people of the region. It has already played a part in downfall of several autocratic regimes, while inspiring necessary governmental reforms in several other states, not entirely without support of the Obama Administration. This has not proved to be totally positive for American interests or President Obama, however; indeed it proved very costly and tragic in Benghazi. But dealing with unexpected challenges is very much the stuff of foreign affairs. It is also quite clear that Obama has recognized that the *Arab Spring* is an important movement, too important to be used as a domestic political football to achieve much less significant ends.

**China**

On November 17, 2011 Barack Obama spoke to the Australian Parliament, and more or less announced the beginning of what has come to be called his *Asia Pivot* in terms that were clearly taken as a challenge by Beijing, “As a Pacific nation, the United States will play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future.” This was probably good news for Australia, New Zealand, the countries of South Asia, as well as Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea, but also served to reinforce Chinese anxieties about American intentions toward Beijing. Whether or not it was meant to be threatening, the move was a timely and dramatic reassertion of an American presence in the Western Pacific rim,

In this context, President Obama’s bold strategic pivot to Asia, announced in

November 2011, clearly sought to generate confidence in America’s future

leadership in this region and respect for Washington’s capacity to orchestrate

this very impressive diplomatic tour de force. Many in Asia have been

worrying about American decline. President Obama projected American

optimism, principles, determination and leadership.[[66]](#footnote-66)

The People’s Republic of China is one of a number of rising states that may vie for the title of superpower at some time. There are questions about this group often referred to as the *BRIC*s (Brazil, Russia, India and China) which include China.[[67]](#footnote-67) But there is also no doubt that the PRC must be considered a *great power*, and one that is enormously significant concerning American foreign policy. Additionally, there is no doubt that the United States had something to do with awakening this dragon for its own ends, as well as a necessary recognition of reality.[[68]](#footnote-68) China is a major economic/financial partner of the United States, but that is a sword that cuts two ways because this has not been the most comfortable of relationships.[[69]](#footnote-69) And, as suggested, the rise of China has not been without issues. China’s rise has come with great cost to environmental issues, especially pollution, and to be blunt a dramatic and growing gap between its very rich and very poor. Ironically, it could be said that modern China has been built on the backs of its poor, not unlike the building of the Great Wall, and yes it has blatantly exploited its impoverished workers; Chairman Mao where are you? China’s rise has also had much to do with profitable partnerships with Western industrial states (especially the United States) and by profiting from their misfortunes (including the United States). Relations with China presented President Obama with daunting challenges that may have long-term effects for both countries, “…the crisis catapulted China into the forefront of economic powers as Beijing adopted the world’s largest stimulus package and helped fuel the global economic recovery.”[[70]](#footnote-70) The symbolic image of a rising China and a challenged United States was undeniable and had an impact on how these powers viewed each other. Regardless, it is clear each country views the other in very different ways and that these relations include issues on a number of levels.[[71]](#footnote-71)

On the one hand, there is the China that appears put out that American foreign policy tends to be overly aggressive, if not hostile to Beijing.[[72]](#footnote-72) In this vein, Hillary Clinton was not all that popular in Beijing. But then as recent headlines hold, China should not be regarded as friendly either.[[73]](#footnote-73) In this case there needs be a stern but engaged policy.[[74]](#footnote-74) For over two decades the United States has embraced a positive policy of trade and engagement with regular “balancing,” meaning that now and again issues have had to be addressed, “China’s massive bilateral trade surplus with the United States and Beijing’s accumulation of dollar-denominated assets are thus worrisome for reasons that transcend economics.”[[75]](#footnote-75) Thus a significant part of Obama’s *Asia Pivot* is an attempt to improve relations with China by encouraging her to be more open to being an equal player in the global economy, but also note this policy included a movement of American naval strength to Asia.[[76]](#footnote-76)

China clearly wants to be accorded the status and respect that it feels it has earned by becoming a great power, American policy towards China had recognized China’s new power and obviously has given Beijing warranted diplomatic attention, but Obama has also suggested that China needs to be a better partner in global affairs. China has complained that it has done its fair share, but their actions prove it is obvious that everything Beijing does is carefully calculated to serve its own interests first across the board. China sees the United States as power they have learned much from and owe a lot to, but they also see Washington as purposely trying to keep China from gaining power and prestige.[[77]](#footnote-77) Obama has devoted a tremendous amount of energy to relations with China on many levels noting its growing importance in relations with North Korea, Iran, India, and anything that comes up in the United Nations Security Council. Obama’s intentions were summed up rather neatly by Walter Russell Mead,

The Obama administration has taken on the delicate and difficult task of restoring

balance to the region, attempting to check Chinese assertiveness without stumbling

into an awkward containment policy against Beijing.[[78]](#footnote-78)

China’s economic importance goes without saying, and it is vital to understand the level of interdependence that exists here. But there are bound to be issues that depict growing rivalry as well. Perhaps they are over-emphasized. But they certainly must not be ignored either.[[79]](#footnote-79)

**The Nuclear Question: North Korea and Iran**

It could be said that at best Barack Obama held serve in dealing with the prospects of nuclear arms and North Korea and Iran. The former retained the capability, and indeed has detonated a third nuclear test, while speculation remained about whether Iran’s nuclear program had progressed sufficiently to produce a nuclear weapon, or if that state would in fact actually take that step. Sanctions were implemented and tightened in each case, and the president suggested that no reaction was off the table. Perhaps most importantly, the PRC seemed to be losing patience with Pyongyang, while Obama was able to keep Israel from launching pre-emptive air strikes at Iran. Overall, failure to achieve significant success with North Korea and Iran did tend to reduce the impact of the successful efforts with Moscow regarding the nuclear question.

**North Korea**

The mixed record of the Bush Administration with North Korea offered little hope that the Obama Administration would have an easier time dealing with Pyongyang. On the one hand, the government in Pyongyang was an important part of any serious effort at non-proliferation, on the other, there seemed little likelihood that North Korea would play a constructive part in Obama’s *Asia Pivot*. Making matters much worse, North Korea challenged the sensibilities of the world community on two dramatic occasions: on April 5, 2009 it tested, with only mixed results, a three-stage, long-range missile, then on May 25, 2009 it tested a nuclear weapon. Both events irritated Beijing, but aside from a behind the scene dressing down, China seemed unwilling to take a major hand regarding its historic neighbor, much to the frustration of Obama.[[80]](#footnote-80) North Korea posed two problems for the United States: it presented a severe issue regarding the proliferation issue, and it did little to help with American-Chinese relations, indeed it complicated them; and the prospects for any positive change were elusive at best.[[81]](#footnote-81) Sanctions have not had a great effect, and China seemed unwilling to make a demonstrative move here, which it will surely have to do at some time. North Korea does little to promote China’s economic interests and is fast becoming a potential threat to regional stability which is also counter to Beijing’s long-term interests. Moreover, North Korea seems less and less concerned about China’s sensibilities.

**Iran**

Beyond a good deal of political show, Iran has remained something of a paradox. It became abundantly clear that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s power was in decline, leaving the nuclear issue in the hands of Iran’s mullahs, particularly Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, which is itself both good news and bad news.[[82]](#footnote-82) The *faqih* (“supreme leader”) of Iran on several occasions emphasized that nuclear weapons would be violation of Islamic law but also rebuffed American offers for direct talks as being useless.[[83]](#footnote-83) And it is clear that the sanctions have succeeded in imposing great hardships on the Iranian people, and it is significant that Obama has moved both Russia and China to be supportive of economic sanctions. Thus Obama has been willing to give the sanctions time to work. Pressure was leveled by the political right that Obama should make specific warnings about surgical, preemptive air strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities. While Obama has noted that nothing is off the table, he did not show any sign of seriously considering such an action, part of this is due to the limited likelihood of success given that many of these facilities have been built deep underground. The more likely problem came from Israel where Prime Minister Netanyahu was quite bellicose about this possibility. It is almost certain that George W. Bush, and Barack Obama talked Netanyahu out of this on several occasions. Clearly, the possibility of more dramatic action against Iran was also put off until after the 2012 American Presidential Election and the 2013 Iranian Presidential Election despite clamoring from the right to take more dramatic, possibly military, action.[[84]](#footnote-84)

**Failure at *Gitmo*?**

A significant disappointment in Obama’s first term of office involved the issue of the American prison at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba which has come to be known simply as *Gitmo*, and the legal status of the detainees held there. Technically this is a domestic issue, but it certainly has international ramifications given its part in the so-called war on terror inherited from the Bush Administration. Obamas’ efforts to fulfill promises made during the 2008 election to close this facility and apply some element of due process of law to the detainees held there have, on several occasions, run into a stone wall largely in Congress; and the prospects for the future are not particularly bright. In late January 2013, Daniel Fried, who had been appointed by Obama with the task of conducting a program to close the facility, was reassigned with no immediate indication that his position would be filled. The president was, and remains adamant about the use of extraordinary, international rendition, enhanced interrogation techniques, and torture, but an apparent inability to deal with *Gitmo* leaves a major question mark in the analysis of his first term of office.[[85]](#footnote-85)

**The *Paradigm of Imperial* Decline or the Beginning of**

**An *Imperial Restoration*?**

As spring struggled to emerge in 2011, the United States found itself embroiled in two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, despite some trends that suggested end games in each one, involved in a new intervention in Libya, and was very anxious about events throughout the Islamic world in political turmoil, and still struggled economically. Given these realities even with some critical weaknesses Paul Kennedy’s thesis based on the over-extension of great powers, what he called *imperial overstretch* and what could more generally be referred to as the *paradigm of imperial decline*, which was once again of interest. On the one hand, there was sound cause for criticism when Kennedy published his work, The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers in 1987. He speculated as to events from 1987 to 2000 and proved to be off target as far as the United States was concerned (as pointed out by Samuel P. Huntington in his important counterpoint regarding the United States as shall be discussed below) but was fairly accurate with the Soviet Union.[[86]](#footnote-86) The United States made significant strides towards economic stability under President Clinton who balanced the national budget (indeed, produced surpluses) and began a process to pay off the national debt. Lest it be forgotten it was essentially the years between 1991 and 1999 that inspired reference to the “American moment.” On the other hand, it became quite tempting to reconsider Kennedy from 2006 on. After the invasion of Iraq in 2003 it became all too clear that the United States was overextended militarily, politically, and economically. Embroiled in essentially three wars, an unprecedented event, the war on terror, the war in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq, failing international coalitions and associations, growing trade deficits, and what would amount to a doubling of the national deficit and debt, by 2008, the *Empire of Liberty* was on the verge of catastrophe. Three years later, one could add crises across the Islamic realm including Libya, which involved direct American military intervention. Perhaps Kennedy was just a bit premature in his analysis. Indeed, much of what Kennedy had warned about in his notion of *imperial overstretch* seemed to be coming about.[[87]](#footnote-87)

There is little argument that Kennedy was fairly prescient in forecasting the demise of Soviet power, though he could not have foreseen the unexpected details of that stunning event. Essentially he hit the major point and was so much closer to the truth than the later *Reagan won the Cold War* scenario. Overextended militarily, politically and economically the Soviet Union was hardly in a position to make the dramatic transitions called for by Mikhail Gorbachev to compete in a world that had come to demand a much higher degree of financial and economic competition than the Soviet state was capable of. Gorbachev’s bold efforts at reform failed and the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991. Certainly, this was a case of *imperial overstretch*. The irony, of course, was in how the *evil empire* came to an end, a failed coup, the simple refusal to sign the *Treaty of Union*, and a presidential resignation on Christmas day, “Never before has there been a case of an empire that caved in without a war, revolution, or invasion.”[[88]](#footnote-88) Or as George C. Herring described it, “…an event as momentous in its ramifications as it was anticlimactic in its occurrence.”[[89]](#footnote-89)

True, Kennedy couched his comments about the United States at the time in reference to the long-term and what he emphasized by *longevity*, still, events raised questions about his case for the United States which actually grew in power, and seemed to validate Samuel P. Huntington’s critique of the Kennedy paradigm in 1988/1989.[[90]](#footnote-90) In 2012, it was Huntington’s notion of a dynamic United States that unlike other great powers possesses the ability to renew its power that came into question.

***Imperial Restoration*? Samuel P. Huntington Revisited**

With his first term as president in the book, the prospects for a full restoration of American power, influence and respect are still in question, but improved to be sure. The economic situation remains significant on both the national and international levels with an annual deficit that is larger than ever, as is the national debt. On the one hand, the war in Iraq has ended. And the war in Afghanistan is all but over. But despite efforts to stimulate the domestic market and stabilize world trade Obama still faces an economic situation that will clearly continue through his second presidential term, and likely a good deal of time after that. Here alone it has been tempting to revisit Kennedy’s notion of imperial overstretch and other declinist paradigms, all of which seem far more plausible in light of recent events in North Africa and the Middle East, especially with American involvement in Libya. But this may also be a time to reconsider Kennedy’s chief critic, the late Samuel P. Huntington.

For years *PBS* ran a promo for its laudable series *The American Experience* showing images from different decades in American development backed by the wondrous music of John Barry from the film *Dances With Wolves*. The narration promoted the notion that the United States was that unique country that had the capacity to continually reinvent itself, a point that has proven to be true, more or less.

Certainly this was the general point that Huntington promoted in his refutation of Kennedy regarding the United States in his notable piece “The U.S.-Decline or Renewal?” in 1988. Despite the market crash of October 1987, and the enormous sense of pessimism that followed, Huntington posed the simple question: “Is the united States fundamentally a nation in decline? Or is it in the midst of renewal?”[[91]](#footnote-91) At the time Huntington suggested that far from being a great power in decline, the United States was in the process of what he considered a fairly regular process of “renewal.”[[92]](#footnote-92) Citing the necessary economic and financial figures at the time, he conceded that the United States had hit a major block in the road, actually coming close to supporting Kennedy’s *overstretch* thesis, something that was likely to reoccur, but also held that unlike other great powers described by Kennedy, the United States was fundamentally different, and therefore not as prone to the feared outcome of decline and fall,

Declinist literature sets forth images of a nation winding down

economically, living beyond its means, losing its competitive edge to more

dynamic peoples, sagging under the burdens of empire, and suffering from a

variety of intensifying social, economic and political ills.[[93]](#footnote-93)

Huntington offered something of his own great power model countering Kennedy’s assessment of the United States and generally a host of negative opinions quite secure in contemporary financial/economic fact. The two fundamental elements of this model emphasized the ability to renew national power and the diversity or dynamism of the sources of a state’s power,

The ultimate test of a great power is its ability to renew its power.

The competition, mobility and immigration characteristic of American

society enable the United States to meet this test to a far greater extent

than any other great power, past or present. They are the central sources

of American strength.[[94]](#footnote-94)

Unlike any other power of the time, Huntington believed, “…American strength is peculiarly multidimensional,” that is not singularly based on either economic power, political power, or military power, and possesses the ability to adapt, to shift emphasis according to changing national and international condition.[[95]](#footnote-95) Huntington also held that the continuation of American superpower status would accrue according to the simple fact that there was unlikely to be an emergence of an “alternative hegemonic power” in the twenty first century. In this Huntington was almost certainly correct.[[96]](#footnote-96) His ultimate conclusion was simple enough, “…the United States is less likely to decline than any other country. It is distinguished by the openness of its economy, society and politics. Its engines of renewal are competition, mobility and immigration.”[[97]](#footnote-97) It is interesting to consider these “engines of renewal” form 2001 to 2012.

Huntington may actually prove to be right in his assessment of the United States, but any power, especially one that could be described as overextended, is vulnerable to the kind of scenario that might resemble the so-called *perfect storm*, that unexpected coincidence of events where the sum is greater than the parts. Still, the United States does indeed have that innate capacity to reinvent itself every now and again, often amounting to a true renewal of national power. This is evident to a great extent in the events of the past five months. The election of 2008 on many levels marked a seismic change in the American political landscape bringing new economic approaches, dramatic alterations of domestic policies, and significant shifts in foreign policy. All told it could amount to changes that verge on the revolutionary. But only time will tell if the hope and skill of a new administration is equal to the myriad challenges facing the United States and the world at this time, and if Huntington’s older premise of American renewal will again restore American power,

The United States is not immortal and American preeminence is not inevitable.

Yet, some states endure for extraordinary lengths of time, and little reason

exists to assume that recent prophecies of American decline are more accurate

than earlier ones. Every reason exists, however, to encourage belief in such

prophesies in order to disprove them. Happily, the self-renewing genius

of American politics does exactly that.[[98]](#footnote-98)

Huntington’s earlier reference to the “self-renewing genius of American politics” seems to be reflected in some more recent voices if not in a few recent events.

While Fareed Zakaria has offered a broad spectrum of problems facing the United States as a superpower he has nevertheless concluded, not unlike Huntington, that it remains a power apart from others, “…such problems must be considered in the context of an overall economy that remains powerful and dynamic.”[[99]](#footnote-99) He also notes added elements of American power: higher education, a vibrant demography, flexibility, resourcefulness, and resilience.[[100]](#footnote-100) The primary problem identified by Zakaria is what he calls *dysfunctional politics* which has raised its ugly head again even after the 2012 election. He described the United States as “A can-do country…saddled with a do-nothing process, designed for partisan battle rather than problem solving.”[[101]](#footnote-101) Zakaria notes that the so-called unipolar moment may fade and clearly many dimensions of power are shifting away from the United States, but it is not about to happen suddenly, and it may be that ultimately the shift of many of these elements to the rest of the world may still favor the United States,

The world is changing, but it is going the United States’ way. The rest

that are rising are embracing markets, democratic government (of some

form or another), and greater openness and transparency. It might be a

world in which the United States takes up less space, but it is one in

which American ideas and ideals are overwhelmingly dominant.[[102]](#footnote-102)

This sentiment is even echoed by the political right. Recently, T. Boone Pickens said “This is the greatest nation in the world. When we get off course, we have the ability to change and do it quickly.”[[103]](#footnote-103)

Niall Ferguson finally suggests that we may be approaching a world without a superpower of any kind, neither a unipolar nor multipolar world, “The future, in short, might prove for a time to be *a*polar, a world without even *one* dominant imperial power, the ninth century, perhaps, but without the Abbasid caliphate.”[[104]](#footnote-104) But this scenario would still leave the United States in the mix.

Even Paul Kennedy concedes that in some areas the *American moment* may not be quite over,

It is reasonable to argue that the United States’ military power, being

so massive, will face few direct challenges in the years ahead, even if it will

always find it tricky to handle asymmetric threats from terrorists and other

nonstate actors.[[105]](#footnote-105)

Of course Kennedy remains cautious about the United States’ economic power where he suggests that America has “…reentered a multipolar world after an unusual half century of its own preeminence,” and the United States’ *soft power* which he emphasizes was “frittered away” with the “flawed foreign policies of the past seven years.”[[106]](#footnote-106) Amazingly, even Kennedy was not quite ready to condemn the United States to historical heap of fallen great powers despite the calamities of 2007-2009, which leaves us to speculate about the possibility of American *renewal*. Economic renewal has been slow in coming, and this will continue to be a challenge to Obama. But the situation in Libya produced something of an unforeseen development; much of the world community still sees the United States as a superpower, and has great expectations of that power in dangerous times. Renewed, or not, the world community expected the United States and its president to act when a humanitarian disaster seemed imminent in Libya, and the United States under the leadership of President Obama responded. Indeed the foreign policy record in its first term indicates anything but imperial decline; whether it will amount to an imperial restoration remains to be seen.

**Second Term of Office: New Administration, New Priorities?**

With the dawn of 2013 two sets of questions faced the re-elected Obama Administration: what would this administration look like and what would be its priorities for the next four years? A host of new faces emerged to give the appearance of an almost new administration. And given questions given to Obama’s nominees from the Senate, new priorities might also be in the offing.

Recent issues: continuing shadow of 9/11; fallout from Benghazi; the drones, Syria, and Iran.

What should the new issues be: rebuilding bridges with America’s allies, the Arab Israeli Conflict, Iran, avoiding the pitfall that could be Syria, chasing *al-Qa’ida* into Yemen, Pakistan, and Africa? What among these issues should be deemed as high priorities?

Gone are Hillary Clinton, Leon Panetta, David Petraeus, the primary faces of Obama’s foreign policy in the first term will soon take on the faces of new administrators of foreign policy for the president’s second term. John Kerry has already taken the helm as Secretary of State, John O. Brennan will head the CIA, Chuck Hagel will lead the Department of Defense (DOD), Tom Donilon remains as National Security Advisor (NSA), and Susan Rice will stay on as Ambassador to the United Nations.[[107]](#footnote-107) Amazingly, they are not likely to have two wars to deal with, nor will *al-Qa’ida* bear a mantle of near invincibility. But new problems have risen and will rise anew. And lingering issues such as China, North Korea, Iran, the Arab-Israeli Conflict, continuing efforts dealing with terrorism i.e. *al-Qa’ida*, economic stability on the global level, nuclear proliferation, and *Gitmo* will persist.

**Conclusion: No Good Deed…**

As the 2012 Presidential Election entered its last sixty days, the homestretch, President Barack Obama was thrown an unexpected curve in foreign affairs with the attacks on American embassies in North Africa and the Islamic world generally. Obama held steadfast and was presidential, as one would expect. He exhibited the kind of cool and balanced approach that had much to do with why he had garnered the *Noble Peace Prize* in early 2009, and also displayed a savvy born of accumulated knowledge and experience gained in almost four years as President of the United States. Several things were clear as the election neared: accusations that Obama’s foreign policy amounted to little more than an apology tour were not supported with the facts, nor were taunts that he had acted weakly in regards to taking decisive moves regarding national security. In accepting the *Nobel Peace Prize* in Oslo, Norway (December 2009) Obama had announced a commitment to multilateralism, and would attempt new starts in relations around the world, but he also made clear he would not hesitate to act audaciously in order to protect the United States, its allies and other states, and to carry out what he would determine to be American responsibilities abroad. He would bend history towards those ends as necessary.[[108]](#footnote-108)

In the final analysis it is not clear what will be considered as the most important aspects of Obama’s foreign policy in his first term, and it is far from clear that anything like an *Obama Doctrine* emerged in his first term of office unless it be something to the effect of a restoration of American prestige and respectability. Nor is it likely that the Benghazi affair or controversies about the use of drones will be defining events. Conclusive resolutions of relations with the PRC, North Korea, and Iran remained elusive, while the war on terror, peace in the Arab-Israeli Conflict, outcomes from the *Arab Spring* and an end to the suffering in Syria must await continued attention in a second term.

Barack Obama’s efforts at avoiding economic disaster, nuclear arms reduction beginning with *New START*, ending the war in Iraq and setting the stage for the end of the longest war in American history in Afghanistan, restoration of a policy of multilateralism, the Libyan intervention and fall of Muammar al-Qaddafi, a dramatic pivot towards Asia, and his relentless actions against *al-Qa’ida* and the *Taliban* that included the death of Usama ibn Laden, will prove more lasting and significant effectively setting aside references to the paradigm of imperial decline and perhaps beginning a process of imperial restoration without overtly giving in to the extremes of imperial temptation.

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1. Carter was later awarded the *Nobel Peace Prize* in 2002 for his accumulated life-time efforts. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The United States and President Ronald Reagan did not “defeat” the Soviet Union, but without question ended up the winners. “The United States ‘won’ the Cold War in the sense that the other side gave up the fight.” George Herring’s account of these events is one of the most concise, and evenhanded around. See From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 860-916. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Along with several other Americans, only four Presidents of the United States have received the *Nobel Peace Prize*: Theodore Roosevelt (1906) for negotiating the *Treaty of Portsmouth* that ended the Russo-Japanese War; Woodrow Wilson (1919) for the *Peace of Versailles*; Jimmy Carter (2002) for his lifetime efforts; and Barack Obama (2009) for his efforts to strengthen international diplomacy. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Martin S. Indyk, Kenneth G. Lieberthal , and Michael O’Hanlon produced a pretty even-handed appraisal of Obama’s foreign policy which is really only limited by the fact that their book and a subsequent abbreviation of their findings in an article in Foreign Affairs only covered three of the four years of Obama’s first term. See Bending History: Barack Obama’s Foreign Policy (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2012), 276-286, and “Scoring Obama’s Foreign Policy: A Progressive Pragmatist Tries to Bend History,” Foreign Affairs 91: 3 (May/June 2012): 29-43. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “Yet beyond Iraq, his first-term accomplishments …are sparse.” See David E. Sanger, “Pursuing Ambitious Goals, but Strategy is More,” New York Times (January 20, 2013): 1A [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Reference to the *imperial temptation* should include Robert W. Tucker and David C. Henderson and their examination of such a notion following the liberation of Kuwayt in 1991(the *Second Gulf War*), “…the imperial temptation to which the nation succumbed in the gulf war-and tow which it may fall victim again-involves not rule over others but the brief massive use of military power in which the emphasis is placed in punishment and not rehabilitation.” Use of the term in this paper includes a more general application. See Robert W. Tucker and David C. Henderson, The Imperial Temptation: The New World Order and America’s Purpose (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1992), 15. And reference to an *imperial restoration* should be contrasted with rather than compared with a reference to a *restoration doctrine* described by Richard N. Haas as a return to a more limited foreign policy in a nonpolar world, but not one of *isolationism*, a policy of limited engagement on a budget. See “The Restoration Doctrine,” The American Interest (January/February 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. It is speculated that it could amount to a figure between 1,300 and 1,000 weapons. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Indyk, Lieberthal and O’Hanlon, “Scoring Obama’s Foreign Policy,” 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See Indyk, Lieberthal, and O’Hanlon, Bending History, 13-14, and 194-196. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See Fareed Zakaria, “Can America Be Fixed? The New Crisis of Democracy,” Foreign Affairs 92: 1 (January/February 2013): 22-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ironically, the Great Depression is often traced to the *Smoot-Hawley Act* (1930) which had the effect of reducing American imports and exports by more than with severe global implications. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Indyk, Lieberthal, and O’Hanlon, Bending History, 8-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid., 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid., 74-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Tim Arango and Michael S. Schmidt, “Last Convoy of American Troops Leaves Iraq,” New York Times (December 18, 2012): 4A. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See Michael R. Gordon, and Gen. Bernard E. Trainor, The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, From George W. Bush to Barack Obama (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011). Also see Gideon Rose, “Exiting the Iraq War: A Blow-by Blow Chronicle, New York Times (October 2, 2012): 6C. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The war was no doubt a negative chapter in the history of the republic; worst of all it took needed resources of all kinds away from the campaign in Afghanistan and the war against *al-Qa’ida* and Usama ibn Laden. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Following the so-called battle of Tora Bora in Afghanistan in December of 2001, Usama ibn Ladin, Mullah Muhammad Umar and other *Taliban* and *al-Qa’ida* virtually disappeared into the tribal frontiers along the Afghan-Pakistani border where the terrain is rugged and the people generally have embraced elements of radical, militant Islam. Eventually this did not deter Obama, at least in the search for Usama ibn Laden as is discussed below. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The notion that a number of imperial powers saw their ends or the beginning of their ends in Afghanistan has been a popular though exaggerated theme and became the focal point of Seth G. Jones’ book In the Graveyard of Empires (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See Peter L. Bergen, The Longest War: The Enduring Conflict between America and Al-Qaeda. New York and London: The Free Press, 2011), 309-334. For general information of the war in Afghanistan and the Afghan-Pakistani frontier also see Sarah Chayes, The Punishment of Virtue: Inside Afghanistan After the Taliban (New York: Penguin Books, 2006); Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin, Three Cups of Tea (New York: Penguin Books, 2006); and Ahmed Rashid, Descent Into Chaos: The U.S. and the Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia (New York: Penguin Books, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Bergen, The Longest War, 330. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. *SITREP*, *British Forces Broadcasting Service* (*BFBS*), January 9, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The exception was Ronald Reagan who initially seemed to want nothing to do with the Camp David initiatives and later, after the disaster of the U.S. Marine Corps. barracks in Beirut Lebanon and the Iran-Contra scandal kept issues in the Middle East at a distance. George H.W. Bush (along with James Baker) seized new opportunities opened by the defeat of Iraq and the liberation of Kuwayt (the Second Gulf War 1990-1991) to jump-start the peace process that led to success at Madrid and Oslo. William Jefferson Clinton made a major effort to replicate Carter’s Camp David success with a last ditch effort in 2000. And George W. Bush became the first president to officially embrace a two-state solution, but his pre-conditions effectively made any progress impossible. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Holbrooke was followed by Marc Grossman and then David Pearce. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See Indyk, Lieberthal and O’Hanlon, Bending History, 112-140. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. An initial apology to George Lucas, but it is the theme of this year’s conference. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Literally the time of the death of Usama ibn Laden. Apologies to Mark Boal and Kathryn Bigelow. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. See Mark Bowden, The Finish: The Killing of Osama Bin Laden (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2012); and Peter L. Bergen, Manhunt: The Ten-Year Search for Bin Laden From 9/11 to Abbottabad (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. For dramatic impact see *Zero Dark Thirty*, Kathryn Bigelow, dir., Mark Boal, prod., 157 mins., Columbia Pictures, 2012, Sony Home Entertainment , 2013, DVD; for more accurate accounts see Bowden, The Finish; and Bergen Manhunt. A brief version of Mark Bowden’s account was presented as “The Hunt for ‘Geronimo’” in Vanity Fair 627 (November 2012): 144-150, and 190-194; ironically the article follows immediately after Juli Weiner’s piece on the latest James Bond epic, *Skyfall*, “Bond Ambition,” 138-143. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Later interrogation of women captured at the compound declared Usama ibn Ladin had been in Pakistan for seven to eight years. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. May 26, 2009. Bowden, “The Hunt for ‘Geronimo,’” 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Bowden, The Finish, 247-249. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. In 1998 President Clinton ordered two cruise missile strikes against *al-Qa’ida*, one aimed at Usama ibn Ladin in Afghanistan which did considerable damage but missed the intended target. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. The very memory of what had occurred in 1980 with the failed rescue attempt known as *Operation Eagle Claw* or *Desert One* was almost crippling and was especially acute with John Brennan who had been involved in that event. See Bergen, Man Hunt, 148 and 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. The *McRaven Option* was named after Vice Admiral William McRaven, leader of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), who effectively designed and commanded the raid. Delivery, backup, and extraction were handled by the 160th Special Aviation Regiment (Airborne)-*Night Stalkers*. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. As mentioned in footnote 22 (and listed in the Bibliography of this paper) there are a variety of available public accounts of the search for Usama ibn Laden and the operation that resulted in his death but the most reliable (but not without their limitations, and some factual errors, as they were rather hurried to go to publication) at this time remain Mark Bowden, “The Hunt for ‘Geronimo,’” and The Finish; and Peter L. Bergen, The Longest War, and Manhunt . [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Bowden, The Finish, 245. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. 32 Indyk, Lieberthal, and O’Hanlon, Bending History, 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Bowden, The Finish, 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ibid., 257. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Bergen, Manhunt, 244-245. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Apologies to George Lucas, again. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Note that on January 9 that the order of issues for discussion on *SITREP* for British Forces radio were the visit of Hamid Karzai to the United States, the status of the war in Afghanistan, future troop levels in Afghanistan, the possibility that the American war in Afghanistan may be coming to an end, new faces in the Obama Administration, and then the increasing use of drones. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Even Jon Stewart, who seemed outraged Monday evening, appeared satisfied by Thursday night. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. As February 2013 ended President Obama announced that a base for surveillance drones would be set up in Niger. See Eric Schmitt and Scott Sayare, “U.S. Troops at Drone Base in West Africa,” New York Times (February 23, 1013), 4A [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. 40 Marc Bowden reported that in interviewing President Obama for his book The Finish comment was made about the use of drones, “There’s remoteness to it that makes it tempting to think that somehow we can, without any mess on our hands, solve vexing security problems.” A drone *personality strike* was certainly one of the options considered by President Obama in the operation to seize or kill Usama ibn Laden, but in the end he opted for a SEAL team insertion, “The bombing option was too loud and messy, too many innocents would be killed, and in the end you would not have any way to prove you had killed bin Laden.” See Bowden, The Finish, 152-153, and 196-198. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Noted authority on military policies in the United Kingdom, Christopher Lee, on *SITREP* (*BFBS*, January 9, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Brennan was also questioned about the use of waterboarding as an *enhanced interrogation technique* which he clearly denounced as’ reprehensible”. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. See Bergen, The Longest War. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. This comment proved to be the source of Stewart’s outrage on February 4, which he backed away from the next Thursday with the release of additional documents to Congress earlier that day. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Some reference might also be made to President Gerald Ford’s *Executive Order 12333* (1976) which is still on the books and stated “No person employed by or acting on behalf of the United States Government shall engage in, or conspire to engage in assassination.” Ford was reacting to public disapproval of assassination as part of policies in Southeast Asia; The term *terminate with extreme prejudice* was utilized in official correspondence to refer to the process later popularized in the film *Apocalypse Now(Redux)*, Francis Coppola dir. and prod. 153 mins, Paramount Pictures, 1979; Paramount, 2006, DVD. Of course at the time there was little concern over threats to the United States from terrorists, and it was generally seen as preventing an attempt to take out a head of state, i.e. President Diem of South Vietnam. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. The Bush Administration was focused on anti-missile defense systems and possible attacks by a rogue state attacking the United States in a manner consistent with Cold War thinking as the very unconventional terrorist hijackings and attacks took place even with warnings from the previous administration. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. See Bradley Cook, and G. Michael Stathis, “Democracy and Islam : Promises and Perils for the Arab Spring Protests,” The Journal of Global Responsibility 3: 2 (2012): 175-186. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. American antipathy towards this regime during the Reagan presidency is well known; and it is understood that George W. Bush embraced Qaddafi as part of a broader attempt to support an end to certain arms programs in Libya that included certain weapons of mass destruction or possible research concerning them most especially nuclear research. This proved controversial especially with public opinion that still held Qaddafi responsible for many acts of terrorism. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. There are some 140 tribes in Libya including the al-Warfalla, the largest tribe, the al- Qadadfa, Qaddafi’s tribe (one of Libya’ smaller tribes), and numerous tribes that have already begun to turn away from Qaddafi including the Beni Walid, the al-Zintan and the al-Zawiya. Initially, Qaddafi had tried to break down the traditional tribal system in Libya but in the end coopted them variously through oil money and economic connections with Europe. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. There were reports of American *black ops*., Special Operations Forces, or covert operations, in support of rebels on the ground. On March 31, 2011 MSNBC reported that President Obama had already considered a *Presidential Finding*, a necessary first step to authorize covert operations. Also see Schmitt, “C.I.A. Played Major Role Fighting Militants in Libyan Attack,” New York Times (November 2, 2012): 4A. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. See Francis D. Wormuth and Edwin B. Firmage, To Chain the Dog of War: The War Power of Congress in Law and History, 2nd ed. (Urbana and Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 1989), 1-15and 107-109; and David Gray Adler, “The President’s War-Making Power” in William Lasser, ed. Perspectives on American Government: A Comprehensive Reader (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1992), 428-436. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. *The War Powers Resolution*, of course, has had its own problems. It was initially vetoed by Richard M. Nixon, a veto that was overridden in Congress, and has since been declared unconstitutional by every President since Nixon excepting Jimmy Carter, William Jefferson Clinton and Barack Obama, but it has yet to be implemented fully, therefore the question of constitutionality remains somewhat moot. In fact, it may prove to be an unconstitutional delegation of the *war power* by Congress, but is almost certainly not an unconstitutional limitation of presidential power as contended by Nixon and his legal advisor William H. Rehnquist. See Wormuth, “The Nixon Theory of the War Power: A Critique,” University of California Law Review 60 (1972): 623-624; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Imperial Presidency (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 301-307, 433-435, and 441. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Chapter XIV, “Of Prerogative” John Locke, Two Treatises of Government, Thomas I. Cook, ed. (New York: Hafner Press, 1947), 203-207. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. See Wormuth, “The Vietnam War: The President Versus the Constitution” in Richard Falk, ed., The Vietnam War and International Law (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 711-803, and “Presidential Wars: The Convenience of Precedent” in Dalmas H. Nelson and Richard L. Sklar, eds., Essays in Law and Politics (Port Washington and London: Kennikat Press, 1978), 118-126. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. The outcome did morph into the basis for the *Clinton Doctrine* which focused on the prevention and eradication of genocide. See Herring, From Colony to Superpower, 932-934. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. John Milius insists that the statement is factually based. See *The Wind and the Lion*. John Milius, dir., and Herb Jaffe, prod. 119 min. MGM/United Artists, 1975; Warner Home Video, 2004, DVD. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Candidate Obama remarked to the Boston Globe in 2007 that “The President does not have the power under the Constitution to unilaterally authorize a military attack…History has shown us time and again…that military action is most successful when it is authorized and supported by the legislative branch.” [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Reaction had already been underway, see Schmitt, “C.I.A. Played Major Role Fighting Militants in Libyan Attack.” [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Indyk, Lieberthal, and O’Hanlon, Bending History, 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Compare Ruchir Sharma, “Broken BRICs: Why the Rest Stopped Rising,” Foreign Affairs 91: 6 (November/December 2012): 2-7 with Fareed Zakaria’s earlier comments on the “rise of the rest” in The Post-American World (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Thanks to Henry Kissinger, Richard M. Nixon, and Jimmy Carter. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. The fact that the United States also owes part of its national debt to China is probably overstated in importance but it still amounts to about $1.16 Trillion about the same that is owed Japan. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Indyk, Lieberthal and O’Hanlon, Bending History, 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. See Andrew J. Nathan, and Andrew Scobell, “How China Sees America: The Sum of Beijing’s Fears,” Foreign Affairs 91: 5 (September/October 2012): 32-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Cyber-hacking, and manipulation of currency (the *yuan*) and exchange rates are two of a number of issues that have served to distance Beijing and Washington. See Derek Scissors, and Arvind Subramanian, “The Great China Debate,” Foreign Affairs 91: 1 (January/February 2012): 173-177; and “Yuan for the Money,” The Economist (February 9, 2013); also see David E. Sangor, David Barboza and Nicole Perlroth, “China’s Army Seen as Tied to Hacking Against the U.S.,” New York Times (February 19, 2013): 1A. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. See Aaron Friedberg, “Bucking Beijing: An Alternative U.S. China Policy,” Foreign Affairs 91: 5 (September/October 2012): 48-58. It is interesting how Foreign Affairs choose to present this piece juxtapositioned with the Nathan/Scobell piece mentioned above. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Ibid., 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. See Indyk, Lieberthal and O’Hanlon, Bending History, 24-69 ; also see Elisabeth Bumiller, “Words and Deeds Show Focus of the American Military on Asia,” New York Times (November 10, 2012): 1A. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Nathan and Scobell, “How China Sees America.” [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Recent Books: The United States, Foreign Affairs 92: 2 (March/April 2013): 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. It is interesting to note the comparatively large chapter, and very detailed discussion, devoted to China by Indyk, Lieberthal and O’Hanlon in Bending History which is quite telling regarding the importance of these relations. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Ibid., 38-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Proof of this was borne out in December 12, 2012 with a very provocative missile test that was successful, and then a third nuclear test on February 12, 2013 further exasperated the Obama Administration but was justified by Kim Jong Un as necessary to defend North Korea from “vile hostile acts,” a reaction perhaps to the passing of UN *Security Council Resolution 2087* calling for even more sanctions. The difference in this latest provocation is that it essentially humiliated Beijing which had warned Un not to test this device. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Presidential elections are set for June 14, 2013 and Ahmadinejad will have served his two terms allowed by the Iranian Constitution. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. The term *faqih*, invented by Ayatollah Rouhollah Khumayni, is commonly translated as supreme leader and in effect that is essentially true since he combines religious, political and even legal authority with veto power in foreign affairs and almost the same power over legislation from the *Majlis*, Iran’s parliamentary body. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. The result of such military audacity could well result in a fourth war in the Persian Gulf, but of course so could nuclear arms in the region. There have been three wars in the Persian Gulf since 1980. Each of them at some time has been referred to as *The Gulf War*: The First Gulf War between Iran and Iraq (1980-1988); The Second Gulf War between Iraq and a United States led United Nations Coalition (1990-1991); and The Third Gulf War between Iraq and a United States led coalition (2003- ). See G. Michael Stathis, “The Case for *The Third* *Gulf War*: Placing the 2003 Iraqi War in a Proper Political Context,” The Journal of the Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters” 81 (2004): 263-284. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. And little more than a veiled reference to these issues in the recent *State of the Union* *Address* was not reassuring. See Adam Serwer, “Obama Pretty Much Gives Up Closing Gitmo,” Mother Jones (January 29, 2013); and Eli Lake, “The Unending Gitmo Nightmare,” The Daily Beast (February 13, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Note especially *The Soviet Union and Its “Contradictions*,*”* and *The United States: The Problem of Number One in Relative Decline* in Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers, 488-514, and 514-535. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Ibid., 514-515. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Sir Isaiah Berlin quoted in Walter LaFeber, America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-1996, 8th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), 347. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Herring, From Colony to Superpower, 913. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Huntington, “The U.S.-Decline or Renewal?” [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Huntington, “The U.S.-Decline of Renewal?” 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. “The image of renewal is far closer to the American truth than the image of decadence purveyed by the declinists.” Ibid., 76-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Ibid., 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Ibid., 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Ibid., 90-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Ibid., 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Ibid., 89 [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Ibid., 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Zakaria, “The Future of American Power,” 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Ibid., 31-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Ibid., 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Ibid., 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Quoted in Esquire 151: 2 (February 2009): 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Fergusson, Colossus, 298. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Paul Kennedy, “The Distant Horizon: What Can ‘Big History’ Tell Us About America’s Future?” Foreign Affairs 87: 3 (May/June 2008): 132-133. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Though rumors persist that Rice will eventually be appointed as the NSA, a post that does not require confirmation by the Senate. This move would add needed diversity and some different perspectives to aid the president in making foreign policy. It would also serve as political payback for the nasty treatment she received from members of the Senate before she eventually withdrew her name as a nominee for Secretary State. The unnecessary political wrangling evident in the confirmation hearings of Kerry, Hagel and Rice, largely regarding the Benghazi affair and the policy concerning the use of drones, were hardly productive, and seen as crass political nit picking by Republicans aimed to discredit a Democrat as president. Here especially certain members of Congress seem to have forgotten an old adage of American government: politics in making foreign policy ends at the shores of the sea. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Indyk, Lieberthal, and O’Hanlon, Bending History, 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)