

# Diplomacy for the Future

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Ronald Reagan often said, “We have arms because we have tensions, not the other way around.” Of course, arms—and particularly nuclear arms—do create tensions. Nevertheless, President Reagan has a good point. So part of the effort to find our way to a world free of nuclear weapons must be an effort to construct a world where hope and achievement relieve tension and where diplomatic engagement resolves problems. Even virtually perennial disputes such as those in Kashmir or the multiple tensions in the Middle East can be better managed when the diplomatic atmosphere is positive. What can be done to achieve this result? Let us start by setting out the main challenges.

A truly outstanding feature of the world today is the strength of the economy on a global scale. Expansion is taking place in most countries and all regions of the world. A world once split by the cold war now operates as a global economy, able to raise standards of living by a broader application of the law of comparative advantage. Low-income-per-capita countries, as in the case of China, India, Brazil, now Indonesia, and others, are experiencing rapid economic advances. New middle classes are emerging. Poverty, while still a huge problem, is going down. Of course, there are problems. Some people’s incomes are rising faster than others’—as is always true—but relatively few people are absolutely worse off than before. In many

respects, you could say the world has never been at such a propitious moment. In this respect, a golden age is upon us.

At the same time, there is more tension than ever in the world as destructive weapons, even nuclear weapons, appear in more hands, as the international system for limiting their spread erodes, and as loosely structured arrays of Islamic extremists, some supported by Iran, use the weapon of terror. The nation-state, the historic way of organizing civilized life and governmental activity, is under attack, and all too many parts of the world are barely governed. Such places, used by terrorists for training and launching attacks, are a grave danger to the civilized world.

The diplomatic task for the future, then, might be called “protecting the golden age” from assaults by radicals who want to change the system and who use violence indiscriminately—the weapon of terror—as a primary means of persuasion. How is this task to be accomplished?

First of all, we should be careful not to undermine the conditions that have helped make the world economy flourish. But today in the United States, and also more widely, there is a growing sentiment that would put sand in the gears of trade with the aim of trying to protect specific jobs. If this sentiment is translated into legislation, much damage will be done—including harm to American workers, let alone workers elsewhere. We and other countries have been there before, notably between the two world wars, and we should know better than to return to those grim times. This means being careful about booby traps. For instance, you can be strong supporters of improving the environment on a global, let alone national scale, while being skeptical about imposing environmental requirements on openness to trade. Protectionism painted green is still protectionism.

A second objective in the economic area is to encourage further development. Many Muslims, especially Arabs, see themselves—correctly—as missing out on the last several centuries of industrial development. Arguably a necessary condition for their politics to change for the better is for them to catch up economically. For perspective, it is useful to remember that, not very long ago, both China and India were widely seen as mired in poverty and stuck there with hope-

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less politics. Among Islamic countries, the Arab states have been especially held back by the appeal of destructive socialism and authoritarianism, and, for some of them, by the well-known “oil curse.” The latter are now flush with money but the record shows that this situation might not endure. They need better economic policies, and they now have more examples to look at than just the already wealthy countries. This implies moving away from policies that are often ostensibly populist but that actually protect their elites. So they need to produce goods and services (other than oil-related ones) and the ways to do this are now on display around the world. We can help ourselves by using less oil and thereby reducing our vulnerability. At the same time, a lower oil price would induce producers to turn to different work. Economic development based on human effort, not just the exploitation of oil wealth, can lead to more open political systems. We must encourage that kind of development in Islamic lands and communities.

But for this to work there must be a demand for their products (other than oil), so sustained world growth and open trading arrangements are needed for them to grow.

Next, looking at the problem from a diplomatic perspective, we have to recognize that today’s world is more fractured than in recent times. A sense of potential chaos is combined with a dependence on oil that has a long history. That dependence is now resulting in huge uncertainties because the areas where the oil is located are in many cases highly unstable. The uncertainty is also propelling vigorous work in scientific, venture capital, and other areas in a search for ways to use oil more efficiently and to find alternatives to oil.

In addition, the sense of drift and potential chaos is fed by the inability of established institutions to function effectively. The UN Security Council, even when a strong statement is issued, typically fails to follow through with tough action. This, of course, is usually because the members in fact don’t agree and this, in turn, leads to a search for other—non-Security Council—ways to deal with urgent, indeed potentially life-threatening, matters.

The structure for dealing with current issues is loose and elusive. The cold war was a period of serious tension, with a palpable danger

of massive nuclear destruction, so we said good riddance to it. However, its structure was easy to understand with two superpowers, some additional important countries, and many smaller ones. They tended to be aligned with one side or the other. Even the non-aligned movement was, in many ways, subject to the disciplines of the cold war standoff. In a sense, you could say that it was a period when there were relatively few known variables and two big and clear constants.

The current period is different in that the simplicity and discipline of the cold war have eroded drastically. Now we see a world with more variables and with constants that are not as strong, becoming semi-variables themselves. The result is that the world is harder to understand and therefore more uneasy, even though the tension of the cold war has been relieved. One especially important reason is the widespread erosion of sovereign authority. Walter Wriston, in his classic, *The Twilight of Sovereignty*, sets out how the emerging information age means that borders constrain less and less the flow of ideas, information, and even money and people. At the same time, the creation of the European Union, with all its merits from economic and political viewpoints, nevertheless means that the sovereign powers of ancient nation-states of traditional importance are deliberately and seriously eroded.

So all this means that we in the United States and in other countries as well face a radically changed world with rising powers, compromised sovereignty, ungoverned territories, radical Islamists, and immensely powerful weapons spreading around. This situation requires a much larger and invigorated commitment to the tasks of diplomacy, conducted on a global scale. On the U.S. side, fortunately, Colin Powell, in his time as Secretary, strengthened the Department of State to meet this challenge. He reinvigorated the recruitment process, improved the resource base and technological capability, and raised the spirits of the foreign service. But much more needs to be done. The size of the foreign service needs to match global needs, the means need to be developed to retain access to the services of senior people, and more political appointees of high quality need to be brought on board.

This added capability can enable a vigorous program of garden-

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ing: developing relationships around the world by working hard with people in ordinary times. The idea is to get out the weeds when they are small in order to develop an agenda of work that will be helpful to both parties. When you work with people at times when nothing critical is at stake, you lay the groundwork for collaborative efforts with them when extraordinary demands are made.

The amount of contact between U.S. officials and people in many other countries is extensive. The military-to-military contacts are widespread and are fundamentally constructive. Admiral Crowe as Commander-in-Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC) saw to it that, when his ships moved around the islands, they always carried Seabees on them. The idea was that when they made port, the Seabees would get in contact with local officials and put their services to good use. Seabees can fix anything, and they made lots of friends.

We also need to emphasize the importance of exchange visits between the citizens of the United States and those of other countries. Exchange programs have been languishing, but we need to encourage their growth, just as we need to make our libraries as accessible as possible to people around the world.

What ideas can underlie the diplomatic effort? Here are several that have proven useful in earlier times:

- Change toward freedom and openness is possible but requires patience.
- Political openness usually proceeds in tandem with economic development, not ahead of it.
- Strength of purpose and capability are essential.
- Strength and diplomacy are intertwined and are mutually reinforcing.
- A deep and continuing consultative process among like-minded people is needed to create understanding necessary to make hard choices.
- A successful strategy must be based on realism and sustainability.

But, when all is said and done, some problems go on and on.

One way to classify problems is to put them in two piles: problems you can solve and problems that seem insoluble. In the construction business, for example, if someone asks you to build a bridge from A to nearby B, you can solve the problem. If someone asks you to create a construction site free of accidents, you can put up guardrails and other safety devices, but the minute you think that the problem is solved, you've lost. The issue is all about attitudes. You have to realize that the problem is not soluble but needs constant attention and work. In that way, you minimize or maybe even eliminate accidents.

Some of the most intractable international issues are like the second class of problems. Palestinians and Israelis claim the same land and so play a zero-sum game. Anyone can write down a solution on paper, but the answer goes deeper. You have to work at the problem all the time and be willing to take on possibilities, not just probabilities. Constant attention can keep the situation from deteriorating and, eventually, an accommodation might emerge, as in Northern Ireland. We should ask, when considering our work on any problem: Are these ideas being applied and, if not, why not? To paraphrase Teddy Roosevelt, even if you have a big stick, speak softly, firmly, and in a manner that will be sustained by the evolution of facts. Remember that tricks can be played by asymmetric warfare, so look out for surprises.

A guiding idea in the struggle against terrorism is the notion of prevention. If we can help prevent the spread of hateful ideology, then we have taken the first essential step. There are antidotes to terrorism in all Islamic societies, not least because terrorists are killing large numbers of Muslims. Indonesia and Malaysia, countries with large numbers of Muslims, show that governments can strengthen these antibodies by mobilizing public support against the terrorists and by avoiding indiscriminate suppression of dissent. Outsiders can help, but only in a low-key way.

And remember that the strategy of prevention is consistent with the idea that change is possible if prevention can be sustained. So look at Algeria today, where, as reported by the *New York Times*, 60 percent of the enrollment in colleges is by women. They are filling an increasing array of jobs, making up 70 percent of Algeria's lawyers

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and 60 percent of its judges. This is hardly consistent with stereotypes of what is possible in a predominantly Muslim society.

Strength is always a key: economic and ideological strength, and also military capability, willpower, and the self-confidence to act when necessary. A special challenge is created by the potentially devastating consequences of a terrorist attack: huge numbers of lives lost, in addition to destruction of property and economic damage and dislocation. The need for sharply improved intelligence capability is obvious. Knowledge about attacks before they take place makes a huge difference. If we get it, then we have an uncomfortable decision to make, especially when the culprit group or individuals are in a country where terrorists are tolerated or even assisted. But the decision is always difficult: intelligence is hardly ever clear-cut, targets can be elusive and may be embedded in civilian surroundings, consequences may be hard to predict. Nevertheless, the failure to use preventive force in circumstances when one has credible evidence of impending terrorist actions can have terrible consequences. And they are not limited to the immediate damage. The precedent of inability to act carries implications for the future.

Perhaps we can also gain some momentum for this agenda of strength, cooperation, prevention, and diplomacy from the pursuit of two big ideas on a global scale. Each one is drawn from the Ronald Reagan playbook.

First, can we find our way to a global structure that allows us to attack the issues of global warming? The Kyoto Protocol could not work because the concept behind it had no chance of global acceptance. No one should expect that countries such as China or India can accept an agreement that amounts to a cap on their economic growth. The Montreal Protocol, which was developed during the Reagan period, was an international agreement to phase out the production of materials that were depleting the ozone layer of the atmosphere. When the agreement was completed, Ronald Reagan called it a "magnificent achievement." Work remains to be done on this problem. Nevertheless, the Protocol has been implemented with such wide support that former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called it "perhaps the most successful international agreement to date." The

Protocol worked in part because every state knew it would feel the problem and so took part in the solution. The effort was and is action oriented. The only feasible way to move ahead with global warming is to act together, but often in ways that differ from country to country, to do what can be done—now. The key is to remember that one size does not fit all. In this respect, Montreal has a lot to teach post-Kyoto. We can put ideas that work into play once again.

Second, can we find our way to a world free of nuclear weapons? We take a cue from development of that idea at the Reykjavik meeting between President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev. Many steps need to be taken and with great care. Each one presents difficulties and requires hard work and, in some cases, skillful diplomacy. That is the work of this conference. Success here would almost surely have desirable after-effects.

The use of nuclear weapons has never made sense. Now, as they spread, the likelihood that they will be used rather than merely relied upon for their deterrent value grows, with potentially disastrous consequences. The steps identified as the subject of this conference, steps essential for progress to a world free of nuclear weapons, are desirable in and of themselves.

In some cases, the steps interact with other objectives, as in the effort to deal with global warming. For this goal, more use of nuclear power is desirable since electricity is produced without greenhouse gases. But that cannot go forward comfortably under present circumstances. A basic fact of technology complicates the ability to limit access to nuclear weapons: readily fissionable material usable in bombs is generally present in either the fuel going into nuclear power stations and in the spent fuel. This implies that the possessor of such power stations is technically within a short distance of being able to make explosives. The prospect for building more nuclear power plants implies the wider distribution of potential bomb material. So the goal of international control of the nuclear fuel cycle takes on added urgency. Both technical advances and political ones are needed.

The new system would be a return to a version of the earlier Acheson-Lilienthal plan in which nuclear power would have been



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controlled by an international agency. That plan foundered on the rock of the cold war, leaving us today with a weak and crumbling bulwark against widespread access to bomb materials.

The goal of a world free of nuclear weapons and success in taking the steps necessary to achieve it call for a vigorous diplomatic effort on a multinational scale. The dangers growing in the Middle East suggest a concentrated focus on that region. Although the difficulties of achieving it would be great, the alternative to a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East is fearsome to contemplate. Nuclear power, one of the evident paths towards getting the bomb, as in India and Iran, makes no sense in such a petroleum-rich region. However, if it is pursued there, beneficiaries of any international help in this sector should be asked to forego independent uranium enrichment or plutonium reprocessing activities.

Some positive developments have occurred: there have been important successes in tracking critical materials moving around the world. Some countries have given them up and the total number of nuclear weapons in the world is going down.

So the present situation is precarious. On the one hand, there might be a rapid expansion in the number of countries trying to get these weapons; on the other, past successes and prospective dangers are creating new opportunities for diplomacy. The essential need is to persuade governments that their countries will be worse off with these weapons than in a world without them.

The pursuit of big ideas on a world scale might well generate just the sense of cohesion that would help like-minded nations face down other problems that threaten our peace and our prosperity. At the same time, a little cold war history reminds us that unpleasant realities can change if we confront them with strength, cohesion, and sustained diplomatic effort.