

**From:** Office of Terje Rod-Larsen <[REDACTED]>  
**Subject:** January 24 update  
**Date:** Tue, 24 Jan 2012 19:19:06 +0000

---

24 January, 2012

<a href="#">Article 1.</a>	Wall Street Journal <b><u>What Moscow and Damascus have in common</u></b> Editorial
<a href="#">Article 2.</a>	The Daily Beast <b><u>Syria: The Lost Bequest of Hafez Assad</u></b> <a href="#">Fouad Ajami</a>
<a href="#">Article 3.</a>	The National ( <a href="#">Abu Dhabi</a> ) <b><u>A pragmatic principle gains ground in Islamist politics</u></b> <a href="#">Hassan Hassan</a>
<a href="#">Article 4.</a>	Foreign Policy <b><u>The Arab Spring proves that neoconservatives were right all along</u></b> Elliott Abrams
<a href="#">Article 5.</a>	TIME <b><u>The Challenge at Davos</u></b> <a href="#">Ishaan Tharoor</a>
<a href="#">Article 6.</a>	Foreign Policy <b><u>Grading Obama's Foreign Policy.</u></b> <b>Eight experts rate the president's performance so far</b>

Article 1.

Wall Street Journal

## **What Moscow and Damascus have in common**

## Editorial

January 24, 2012 -- Bashar Assad is feeling lonely, though not yet lonely enough. First the Turks, Americans and Europeans de-friended him. Now formerly fraternal leaders at the Arab League want him deposed. The Syrian strongman's forces have killed more than 5,400 people in 10 months and turned a peaceful protest movement into a virtual civil war. But he still has a few friends in low places.

The Iranians aren't giving up on him, and in Moscow Vladimir Putin won't abandon the son of the Soviet Union's favorite Arab tyrant, Hafez Assad. Far from it. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov last week rejected any talk of new U.N. sanctions or arms embargo on Syria. He even defended Moscow's right to arm Mr. Assad as he kills more civilians.

The business daily Kommersant reported yesterday that Russia has signed a \$550 million contract to sell Syria 36 combat jets. Two weeks ago, the aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov called at the Syrian port of Tartus and, according to reports, dropped off a few tons of ammunitions.

The Russians have a stronger stomach for the Syrian's brutality than does the Arab League. A month ago, the group sent an observer mission to Syria to monitor the regime's non-implementation of a plan to withdraw security forces from cities and residential areas. During their stay in Syria, the rate of killing rose. The Saudis, who won't win any Amnesty International contests, pulled out of the mission in horror. Qatar, which played an instrumental role in building support for armed intervention against Libya's Moammar Gadhafi, called for Arab forces to deploy and "stop the killing," in the words of its emir.

The League didn't go that far this weekend but did propose a plan for Mr. Assad to hand power to a deputy and negotiate a transition with the opposition. The regime responded yesterday by blasting this "blatant interference in its internal affairs."

The Kremlin's support makes it harder to ease Mr. Assad out peacefully in Damascus. But perhaps Mr. Putin's loyalty can be explained by the fact that he faces his own growing opposition. His ruling party cheated in December's parliamentary elections and he has announced plans to stay in power for as long as another 12 years, after he runs for president again in

March. The Russian people weren't happy. But Mr. Putin blamed protests on Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Like his friend in Damascus, Mr. Putin also sees a Western plot behind every popular democratic uprising.

Article 2.

The Daily Beast

## **Syria: The Lost Bequest of Hafez Assad**

[Fouad Ajami](#)

January 23, 2012 -- [Bashar](#), son of Hafez Assad, has a son by the name of Hafez. But as the defiance and bloodletting in [Syria](#) would seem to suggest, [Bashar](#) needn't worry about training his son for future rulership. The house that Hafez Assad built, some four decades ago, is not destined to last. Dynasties are, of course, made, not born. The far-flung Ottoman Empire, one of the greatest Eurasian powers, emerged out of the labor and talent of Osman, an obscure early-14th-century chieftain, a warrior among many on the borderlands of the Byzantine Empire. So beguiling was the advance of this Ottoman dominion that a legend of Osman's greatness would be spun by later generations: it was claimed that he was related to Noah through 52 generations. The present ennobles the past, and greatness is invariably in proportion to distance from the men—and the first settings—of great undertakings. The great North African historian Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), perhaps the world's first sociologist, left behind some firm notions about dynasties: they rise, they beget kingdoms, then they decay, like all “created things.” Ibn Khaldun was rather specific: glory and prestige are gained and lost within four successive generations. The “builder of a family's glory knows what it cost him to do the work, and he keeps the qualities that created his glory and made it last.” The son who inherits his mantle had contact with his father and will have learned some lessons from him. “However, he is inferior to him in this respect, inasmuch as a person who learns things through study is inferior to a person who knows them from practical application.” The third generation imitates the ancestors. The fourth loses it all, as its members begin to think that this

glory is their due, given them by virtue of their descent, and not something that “resulted from group effort and individual qualities.”

Arabs are firm believers in *nasab*, inherited merit passed on from father to son, a nobility of the blood. No wonder that Hafez Assad was ambivalent about his beginnings. In 1980, before a gathering of learned notables, the ruler, then a decade in power, recounted the adversity of his childhood. He recalled that at one point in his boyhood he had to quit school temporarily because his father couldn't scrape together the modest tuition. “But we are not commoners. On the contrary, my father was a half *aga*.” The title “*aga*,” a modest one in Ottoman parlance, signified a chief, a man of some standing or means. On another occasion, in the same year, speaking to a peasant syndicate, Hafez Assad would tell them he was in truth one of them. “I am first and last a peasant and the son of a peasant. To lie amid the spikes of grain on the threshing floor is, in my eyes, worth all the palaces in this world.” He had pined to leave that poverty; he had come down from his mountain village to the port town of Latakia, on the Mediterranean, to get a secondary-school education; he had made it to the military academy, and the uniform had given him all that was now his. But he was then in the midst of a vicious sectarian war against the Muslim Brotherhood, with their power in the souks and the mosques of Hama and Aleppo and Damascus. For the Sunni artisans in the warrens of these old cities, the presidency of a peasant—and an Alawite peasant at that, hailing from an esoteric mountain sect beyond the pale of Islam—was a violation of the natural order of things. Syria took pride in its place in Islam. Damascus was the seat of the first Arab kingdom, the first stop the desert warriors from the Hejaz made when they came out of the Arabian Peninsula. In the telling, the Prophet Muhammad favored this realm. He had seen Damascus from the hills above it, and the fabled Ghouta, the gardens and orchards that once circled this city. The prophet, bewitched by his view of Damascus, it is proudly recounted by the Damascenes, had refused to enter the city; it was paradise, he said, and he feared he would be denied paradise in the afterlife were he to enter it in his lifetime. The Ottomans had conquered the territories of Bilad al-Sham (Greater Syria would be the closest rendering of this geography) in the early years of the 16th century—lands that stretched from the borders of Anatolia to Egypt, from the Iraqi desert to the Mediterranean. They divided it into

three provinces: Beirut, Aleppo, and Damascus. Imperial power ebbed and flowed, and the cities were ruled by notables—political and religious elites, landholders who lived in urban surroundings and dominated the lives of the peasants and sharecroppers. Feudalism was the word that described that order. The countryside was neglected—and despised, so consuming was the hauteur of the urban elites. The thought of a peasant from the mountains ruling Damascus, the gathering point of the pilgrimage to the Holy Cities, would have been heresy at the time.

France would acquire a mandate over the territories of Syria (and Lebanon) in the aftermath of the Great War. The French ruled a turbulent, unhappy country for a quarter century. Urban/Sunni Syria never really took to the French. France was poor, and had been a protector of the Christians of the Levant. But for all its brevity, this French interlude helped shape post-independence Syria and indirectly gave rise to the rule of Hafez Assad. France recruited heavily among the minorities—the Druze, the Alawis, the Ismailis—for its colonial levies, the *Troupes Spéciales du Levant*. The Sunni townsmen disdained and avoided military service, thought it the work of lessers. For the Alawis in their secluded, impoverished mountains, the Jabal Ansariya, in the northwest, military service was salvation. Born in 1930, Hafez Assad took that route out of poverty. Schooling in the town of Latakia had spared him a life of toil and destitution. He would graduate from the military academy in 1955—a decade after independence and a time of intense turbulence in Syrian politics.

The country's first coup d'état had come in 1949, a mere three years after independence, and the conspiracies would not cease in the years to come. The old order was coming apart; those feudal families of ease and pedigree and property had squabbled among themselves, and had given parliamentary politics a bad name. Ideology was battering the world of the notables. Communists, believers in Greater Syrian nationalism, Muslim Brotherhood adherents, peasant jacqueries, had made certain that the old order would be overwhelmed. One political party outdid the others: the Baath. It had been conceived in the interwar years in Paris's Latin Quarter by two talented young men from Damascus: the Greek Orthodox Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din al-Bitar, a Sunni Muslim. They had come back to their country loaded with readings and ambition. They became schoolteachers, and the fuse they lit up, the young students they drew into

the net, would determine the political course of Syria—and of neighboring Iraq, for that matter. This was the party that widened the horizons of Hafez Assad, gave him the political language and the ideology that carried him to the summit of political power. (It didn't work out so well for the two founders. Aflaq was expelled from his own party in 1966; Bitar was struck down in Paris by the security forces of the Syrian regime in 1980.)

In this republic of conspirators and coup makers, Hafez Assad was to emerge as the supreme practitioner of the art. There were three Baathist coups—in 1963, 1966, and 1970. He was a minor player in the first, a partner in the second, and the victor in the third against his own erstwhile allies. Indeed, he rose to power, via that third coup, as a leader of a “corrective movement” against the excess and radicalism of the second Baath regime. It was winner take all. The president he overthrew was dispatched to prison, to be released in 1992, sent to Paris on a stretcher, and to die of cancer. As for his former military partner, a fellow Alawite, captivity lasted a year longer, and the man would die in prison.

Violence was at the ready in Hafez Assad's republic. But he was not a sadist (that trait characterized his younger brother and chief enforcer, Rifaat). His violence was selective and methodical. There was always his cunning—a trait that came from his minoritarian background. There was stealth and steel in him. Interlocutors were often left guessing as to his intentions and commitments. Henry Kissinger, who parried with (and studied) the most accomplished in statecraft, negotiated with Assad in the aftermath of the October War of 1973. He came back with high praise for the man's intellect and tenacity: “Assad never lost his aplomb. He negotiated daringly and tenaciously like a riverboat gambler to make sure that he exacted the last sliver of available concessions. I once told him that I had seen negotiators who deliberately moved themselves to the edge of a precipice to show that they had no further margin of maneuver. I had even known negotiators who put one foot over the edge, in effect threatening their own suicide. He was the only one who would actually jump off the precipice, hoping that on his way down he could break his fall by grabbing a tree he knew to be there. Assad beamed.”

Syrians who feared his tyranny credited Hafez Assad with giving the country stability and a place among the nations. In the highest of praise, they said he had changed Syria from a plaything in the region to a player.

He could never surmount the blame that the Golan Heights were lost to Israel in the Six-Day War on his watch, when he was defense minister. Unable to recover the Golan, he did the next best thing: he all but came into possession of Lebanon, practically erasing the border between the two countries. He went into Lebanon in 1976 at the request of the Christian Maronites, to give them sustenance against the Palestinians and the leftist militias. He changed sides innumerable times, and left to the Lebanese the shell of their old sovereignty. He ruled Lebanon by remote control; Lebanese leaders who opposed him—be they Muslims or Christians, clerics or politicians—had a habit of falling to assassins and car bombs. Everyone knew that the trail of these murders led to Damascus, but the outside world had wearied of the Lebanese, and Hafez Assad, the arsonist, had a knack for presenting himself to powers beyond as a capable fireman. His name would forever be sullied by a barbarism in Hama, an intensely religious town in the central plains, with an Alawite hinterland. Hama was the stronghold of the Muslim Brotherhood. It had had earlier troubles with the secular Baathists, and opposed their agrarian “reforms” and the powers the Baath gave to hitherto quiescent peasants. In February 1982, those earlier skirmishes between Hama and the security forces would be overwhelmed by a cruelty the country had not seen before. A good deal of the Old City was reduced to rubble; thousands were killed. The grim work was done by the ruler’s brother, Rifaat, who took the Stalinist purges as a model to emulate. No one is sure how many perished in Hama—the low estimates are 10,000, and there are claims that the numbers could be four times these estimates. He never looked back, he had driven home the message that his regime was there to stay. He took his people out of the political world. He offered them what he saw as a reasonable bargain: they could have safety and be left alone so long as they led apolitical lives. He once gave away the crux of his worldview to a Baath Party functionary. People have “primarily economic demands,” Assad said—they aspire to a plot of land, a car, a house. Those demands could be satisfied “in one way or another.” But there was a small minority, 200 individuals at most, who seriously engaged in politics and would oppose him no matter what. “It is for them that the Mezzeh prison was originally intended.” (The Mezzeh, on the outskirts of Damascus, was one of the dreaded prisons, but there were

others, such as a desert prison in Palmyra—the kingdom of death and madness, a political prisoner said of it.)

Hafez Assad was visited by personal tragedy in 1994: the death in a car accident of his oldest son, Bassel. He had been grooming him for succession. He never recovered from the grief. In the years left to him, he settled on his son Bashar, the eye doctor, as his successor. He bent the Constitution and the leadership to his will. He died in 2000, and his hapless son, 34 years of age, was anointed as his successor. Syrians hoped for the best, thought that perhaps this gangly youth, with a stint in London behind him, would grant them the freedoms his father had denied them. There was a Damascus Spring in the offing, it was said. The new ruler permitted the importation of Western cigarettes; jazz clubs and art galleries made their appearance. Bashar offered his people an olive branch: he married well, a London-born upper-bourgeois young woman from a Sunni family of Homs, Asma al-Akhras. The young couple presented themselves well. But the Damascus Spring was snuffed out. The civic forums were shut down, dissidents were rounded up and dispatched to prisons. The young inheritor was his father's son.

A year ago, when the political hurricane known as the Arab Spring hit the region, Bashar al-Assad proclaimed his country's immunity to the troubles. He was young, the rulers challenged by their people were old, he was anti-American and anti-Israeli, hence the immunity of his regime. He was at one with his people, he said. Then a group of boys in mid-March, in the forlorn southern town of Daraa, went out and scribbled anti-regime graffiti on the walls. They were picked up and tortured. It was as though the custodians of this dictatorship knew that their order hung by a thread. The system rested on fear, and that barrier was crossed. He put his medical training to use. He described the protesters as germs. Four decades of a drab tyranny had not robbed the Syrians of their humor. The Syrian germs require a new doctor, one banner proclaimed. Bashar had squandered his father's bequest.

*Fouad Ajami is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University and co-chair of Hoover's Working Group on Islamism and the International Order.*

The National ([Abu Dhabi](#))

## **A pragmatic principle gains ground in Islamist politics**

[Hassan Hassan](#)

Jan 23, 2012 -- The results are final: Islamists have secured 75 per cent of the seats in Egypt's parliament. They will shape politics for at least five years to come, a chilling thought for many. But the reverse might also be true, not only in Egypt but in every country where Islamists are winning at the ballot box: politics will shape Islamism.

The rise of Islamists in the region has revived a pragmatic form of Islamic jurisprudence that has been neglected for centuries: "siyasa shariyyah", or Sharia-compliant realist governance, deals with politics, economics and law based on an overarching principle known as "maslaha", or public interest. In practice, siyasa shariyyah is often seen as in opposition to traditional jurisprudence.

But it is a school of thought that is gaining ground in different quarters. "Politics is mainly about maslaha," says Dr Salman Al Odah, one of Saudi Arabia's more prominent clerics. Dr Al Odah is in the process of preparing a study on the subject that deals with Sharia in the context of the Arab Spring.

Sheikh Mohammed Hassan, one of Egypt's top Salafi clerics, has used the principle of maslaha to justify the need to comply with the peace treaty with Israel. He maintains that it is not in Egypt's best interests to break the accords, citing the example of a 10-year truce Prophet Mohammed signed with Quraishi leaders when Muslims were weak. Although it was a deeply "unfair and humiliating" agreement, Sheikh Mohammed says, the Prophet adhered to the truce until it was eventually broken by the Meccans. Egypt's Salafi Al Nour party has recently held training courses for its members on siyasa shariyyah.

Ibrahim bin Omar Al Sakran, a Saudi intellectual, has been attacked by extremist Salafis after writing a treatise on siyasa shariyyah in which he

argued that the Islamic political concept of "shura", or consultation, meant that all Muslims must be consulted - rather than a select group - bringing the idea of shura closer to a democratic system. He also argues that governments have contracts with the people that can be revoked just like any other contract if the terms are breached. Political engagement of the entire community, he says, falls within the national maslaha.

The significance is that these opinions come from moderate figures within the Salafi movement, who base their arguments on Sharia texts (the Quran and the Hadiths) and the views of Islam's early generations, making the ideas more credible in the eyes of other religious scholars.

Here in the UAE, the judiciary offers concrete examples of how the principle of siyasa shariyyah is applied. In 2010, Abu Dhabi's Court of Cassation set a legal precedent by ruling that a Muslim can be executed for the murder of a non-Muslim although the UAE hears cases under the Maliki school of jurisprudence - which stipulates the contrary. The lower courts found a Sudanese man guilty of stabbing to death a Christian woman from Ethiopia, and sentenced him to 15 years in prison.

The Public Prosecution appealed against the verdicts and demanded the case be tried under Hanafi teachings, the only Sunni school that calls for the death penalty if a Muslim kills a non-Muslim. Prosecutors said it was in the interest of the country to ensure equality for residents. The victim was a legitimate resident and therefore entitled to protection, security and sanctity for her "blood, honour and money", according to the prosecutor.

The case was then retried under the Hanafi school and the man was sentenced to death. As the cassation court's rulings are binding on local courts, all Abu Dhabi courts now have to treat Muslims and non-Muslims equally in criminal matters. Magistrates at the time cited the pragmatic principle of siyasa shariyyah.

"In Islamic jurisprudence, judges can announce that a person is sentenced to death in accordance with Sharia but should not be executed in consideration of politics," says Dr Ahmed Al Kubaisi, the head of Sharia studies at UAE University. "The interests of the nation precede the interests of the individual. Justice that safeguards the interests of the whole nation is preferable to that which safeguards the interests of the individual."

In another case, the federal Supreme Court ruled against a borrower who refused to pay interest that he owed on delayed loan repayments. The man claimed that interest was forbidden by Sharia and therefore he was not obliged to pay. Lower courts accepted his argument but the Supreme Court ruled the bank's right to charge interest was in line with both UAE secular laws and Sharia.

"As a general rule, interest, whether simple or compound, is prohibited by Sharia," the Supreme Court ruled. "But it has been made necessary for banks to accept simple interest. As long as the necessity persists, and until an economic alternative is established to replace the current banking system, interest is lawful."

The judges based their ruling on the Hadith: "A rich man's delay in payment is an injustice.

"In line with the Hadith, ordering the borrower to pay interest for late payments can be considered a sort of damages, which is compliant with both the UAE law and Sharia," the justices ruled.

Over the last century, Islamic scholastic tradition has been largely shaped by faqihs, or Sharia scholars, whose fatwas have been based purely on religious texts, even if the issues involve scientific fact or public interest. Siyasa shariyyah, on the other hand, requires judgements in light of the specific context and the general maslaha.

Across the region, the principle has gained momentum since Islamists rose in the political arena after the Arab Spring. It is not enough for a scholar to issue a maslaha-based opinion; the reasoning still must be based on a religious text. That is why siyasa shariyyah has such an imposing authority within Islamist thought. And it is why it may fundamentally reshape Islamic jurisprudence in public affairs.

Article 4.

Foreign Policy

## **The Arab Spring proves that neoconservatives were right all along**

Elliott Abrams

January 23, 2012 -- There is a sour mood nowadays about the so-called Arab Spring. Armed gangs [roam](#) in Libya, Salafists [win votes](#) in Egypt, and minorities like the Egyptian Copts [live in fear](#) -- as does the Shiite majority in Bahrain. The whole "experiment" seems to some critics to be a foolish, if idealistic project that promises to do nothing but wreak havoc in the Middle East. These same critics cast blame at the Americans who applauded the Arab revolts of the past year: naive, ideological, ignorant, dangerous folk. As one of those folk, allow me to strike back. The failures of the Arab world's rulers were manifest and explicitly described well before 2011, and it was no secret that these deficiencies threatened their hold on power. In 2002, the U.N. Development Program's Arab Human Development Report [noted](#) that the spread of democracy in recent decades from Latin America to Eastern Europe "has barely reached the Arab States." It was precisely this lack of freedom, the report argued, that "undermines human development and is one of the most painful manifestations of lagging political development." U.S. President George W. Bush recognized this stark reality. "Are the peoples of the Middle East somehow beyond the reach of liberty? Are millions of men and women and children condemned by history or culture to live in despotism?" he [asked](#) at the 20th anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy. "Sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe -- because in the long run, stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty." Bush and the U.N. Development Program's analysis were right, and those who judged that the old regimes could survive forever were wrong. What has been called "authoritarian resilience" turned out to be less impressive after all, and the popular hatred of those regimes much greater.

The Arab Spring is therefore not a peculiarity of history, but a natural outcome for regimes that had quite simply become illegitimate in the eyes of their subjects. Of the possible sources of legitimacy -- such as democracy, religion, monarchic succession, or the creation of great prosperity -- they had none. They were kept in place solely by force, and they were far less stable than the vast majority of scholars, diplomats, and political leaders thought. They were not overthrown because Bush criticized them or President Barack Obama failed to shore them up, but because they lacked a coherent defense of their own rule. Thus the

neocons, democrats, and others who applauded the Arab uprisings were right, for what was the alternative? To applaud continued oppression? To instruct the rulers on better tactics, the way Iran is presumably lecturing (and arming) Syria's Bashar al-Assad? Such a stance would have made a mockery of American ideals, would have failed to keep these hated regimes in place for very long, and would have left behind a deep, almost ineradicable anti-Americanism. This kind of so-called "realpolitik" is the path U.S. President Richard Nixon's administration took after the Greek military coup in 1967, and nearly a half-century later the Greeks have still not forgiven the United States. Of course, the best answer is that we should have been pushing harder for reform all along, but that is after all the Bush/neocon/democracy activist line. Take U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's 2005 [speech](#) at the American University in Cairo or Bush's [second inaugural](#) address -- both reviled by "realists." It would be nice if some of the critics now admitted that such speeches were prophetic, even if the United States was far too tentative in adopting, as Bush put it at the National Endowment for Democracy, "a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East."

Instead, the critics condemn such a strategy for producing the dangers we now see. That is exactly wrong, for it was in fact the policy of ignoring gross oppression that helped bring us to the precipice of today's dangers. Bush, after all, was not urging instant remedies; he [said](#) democratization was "the concentrated work of generations." He was urging reform, in part because it is usually far safer than revolution. Those who thought "durable authoritarianism" could persist forever have far more to apologize for than Bush, democracy activists, or neocons do. But we are where we are, so the next question is whether the Arab Spring will actually fulfill its promise of greater democratic rights or whether it will simply usher in an era of extremist Islamist regimes or new forms of authoritarianism. The pessimists might yet be proved right -- any comparison of the Arab lands to Eastern Europe suggests that many positive elements are missing, not least the magnet and model of the European Union.

Nothing is inevitable, though. African countries such as Botswana, Ghana, and Mali -- and India, for that matter -- have attained democracy despite poverty, low literacy rates, and social divisions roughly similar to those that exist in the Arab world. Nor does experience suggest that Islamist

victories are unavoidable -- or at least, are permanent. A study of 21 Islamic countries conducted by scholars Charles Kurzman and Ijlal Naqvi [found that](#) Islamist parties fare far more poorly than popularly believed and gain their highest vote total in the first election. Kurzman and Naqvi describe a common political arc for Islamist parties. They often emerge from the oppression of the previous regime with a reputation for honesty and courage, and attract many voters who are not zealots. Then when they fail to produce tangible results -- when, to put it starkly, Islam turns out not to be the answer -- many voters turn elsewhere. As the [authors put it](#), "when Muslims are given the opportunity to vote freely for Islamic parties, they have tended not to do so." There are plenty of caveats, of course. Islamist parties do better on average in Arab than non-Arab lands, and in any event, this process takes time, often requiring second and third free elections. But time is also part of the antidote to extremism. As Bush noted in his speech at the National Endowment for Democracy, "The daily work of democracy itself is the path of progress. It teaches cooperation, the free exchange of ideas, and the peaceful resolution of differences." So can Islamist parties learn to play along? Kurzman and Naqvi say yes: "[T]he Islamic parties' overall trend toward publicly embracing global norms of democracy and human rights is significant.... The experience of political participation, both in government and in civil society, has changed their outlooks in ways that they did not imagine when they started down the path of electoral politics." Again, stripping away long-standing and deeply rooted authoritarian systems is a long, dangerous, and violent process. If disorder and economic collapse are the result, we may see the Russian experience repeated: Democracy is equated with chaos; a Vladimir Putin emerges. As we see now in Russia, though, with the surprisingly poor showing of Putin's ruling party in the recent parliamentary elections and the mass protests in Moscow, this too does not appear to last forever. As the old Arab regimes have found out the hard way during the past year, authoritarian rule is inherently unstable. Simply put, people want more. "[T]he regime is branded as an expedient, something temporary and transitional needed to meet the exigencies of the time," Columbia University professor Andrew Nathan [wrote](#) about China's communist system. "Authoritarian regimes in this sense are not forever. For all their diversity and longevity, they live under the shadow of the future,

vulnerable to existential challenges that mature democratic systems do not face." The new governments of the Middle East will need to win the loyalties of populations that seek more dignity, more freedom from oppression, and better lives. Arab culture will prove an obstacle to moving forward: Both the treatment of women and the widespread conspiracy theories blaming Jews and others for national failures will undermine a population's ability to take responsibility for its own future. Years of danger lie ahead, and there will surely be very uneven patterns of democratization -- as has been the case, after all, not only in Africa and Latin America, but even in Europe. But the sour "analysis" that the Arab revolts will lead only, inevitably, and permanently to disaster is based in neither experience nor scholarship.

What should the United States do? Batten down the hatches, for one thing. Who can say what Egypt's or Libya's political situation will be in two years, or four? Prepare to protect U.S. interests and America's allies if, during this long and uneven process, they are threatened. In addition, what America should do is help: help the liberals, the constitutionalists, the democrats, and the human rights advocates, whose enemies -- in the mosques or streets or barracks -- will have plenty of outside support. You might call it adopting a "forward strategy of freedom," requiring, as Bush said, "persistence and energy and idealism." We will not determine the outcome of these struggles, but we can do our utmost to help the good guys win, and win sooner.

*Elliott Abrams is a senior fellow for Middle Eastern studies at the Council on Foreign Relations. He was deputy assistant to the president and deputy national security advisor for global democracy strategy in U.S. President George W. Bush's administration.*

Article 5.

TIME

## **The Challenge at Davos: A Crisis of Global Politics, Not Just the Economy**

## [Ishaan Tharoor](#)

January 24, 2012 -- Despite its rugged alpine beauty, there are few places where the world seems more flat than Davos, Switzerland. The World Economic Forum's grand annual conclave, set to kick off this Wednesday, draws myriad heads of state, global power brokers and cognoscenti for a rarefied meeting of the minds amid canapes and caviar. For years, the forum projected a degree of bullish confidence, heralding the march of globalization and the spread of neo-liberal, free market values across an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world. The meeting's famous "Davos Men" — bankers, public intellectuals, CEOs, politicians — may have reflected an elite, jet-setting global 1%, but these were elites-in-the-know, stewards of a changing world with boundless optimism in the planet's progress, no matter the howls of those motley anti-globalization protesters forever kept on the margins of WEF events.

Not anymore. The atmosphere surrounding this year's summit is perhaps the gloomiest yet. German Chancellor Angela Merkel will kick off proceedings with an address attempting to reckon with the eurozone's miserable year. A panel wringing its hands over the future of liberal capitalism will follow soon thereafter. A report issued by the WEF itself warned starkly of the ["seeds of dystopia"](#) being sown in various continents as "current fiscal and demographic trends could reverse the gains brought by globalization" and lead to "formerly wealthy countries that descend into lawlessness and unrest." Responding to spiraling debt crises and a year of upheaval and protest, Klaus Schwab, the WEF's founder, [summed up the mood](#) of many ahead of the meeting: "We are in danger of completely losing the confidence of future generations. We have the impression of a global burnout."

If that sounds dire, it's because the situation is dire. Oxfam, the international humanitarian NGO, published [its own report](#) last week, detailing a dramatic rise in rates of inequality over the past twenty years in virtually every single major G20 country. The anger that animated 2011's mass anti-austerity protests in Europe and the Occupy movement in the U.S. is backed by hard numbers. A snippet from Oxfam's press release: "The evidence is exploding the myth that governments can wait for economic growth to trickle-down to the poorest," said Paul O'Brien, vice-

president for campaigns and advocacy for Oxfam America. “Too many policy makers have their blinders on to the interests of poor people. It is having devastating impacts, not just on the lives of the poor, but on our natural resources and economic prosperity overall.”

And while popular dismay with business elites and political leaders spawned global protest movements, it’s also led to nationalist backlashes at home that challenge the cosmopolitan dreams of the WEF’s supposed [Global Shapers](#). A recent Pew Global Attitudes survey found that, twenty years after the dismemberment of the Soviet Union, significant majorities in a number of former Communist bloc states have fallen out of love with [multi-party democracy and free-market capitalism](#), a damning repudiation of neo-liberal intellectuals in the U.S. who two decades ago trumpeted [the end of history](#) and the ascension of a global order built very much upon the Davos ethos.

From the plazas of Madrid to the maidans of New Delhi, democratic governments now face the wrath of the disenchanteds. Corruption scandals and feckless political leadership fuel populist rage; countless ordinary citizens, such as those protesting for months in Greece, grew outraged that their democratic rights and the social contract wrought in Athens were being undermined by the vagaries and imperatives of unaccountable international institutions abroad. The German magazine Der Spiegel writes of a noticeable [hard-right turn](#) in parts of Eastern Europe and a general disillusionment overall with the liberal project of the European Union: It’s not just the fragile economies that are at risk. Many central and southern European societies also lack political and social stability. These regions have two decades of uninterrupted reforms and tough austerity policies behind them. Many people there are exhausted, and democracy fatigue, euroskepticism, and aversion towards the once deified West are on the rise.

“In many respects, it’s a process similar to the disillusionment in Eastern Europe with socialism in the 1970s and 1980s,” says Hungarian economic scholar and publicist László Lengyel. “The danger of this is that entire social classes or regions like those in eastern Poland, Slovakia and Hungary fall victim to hopelessness and extremism.”

This is brought into particularly stark relief by the relative success of other political and economic models. For all those who claim that China’s

embrace of capitalism would lead inevitably to democratic reforms, the proof has yet to emerge in any sort of pudding. Published in time for Davos, the Economist ran a special report on the vitality of [state capitalism](#) — as seen in authoritarian and quasi-authoritarian countries like China and Russia, and even to a degree in democracies like Brazil and India — with the growing influence and clout of Chinese state-run companies becoming increasingly apparent in every corner of the globe. The report’s author, Adrian Wooldridge, writes: “The era of free-market triumphalism has come to a juddering halt... State capitalism increasingly looks like the coming trend.” Ian Bremmer, head of the Eurasia Group, a global consultancy, and now known for being the town-crier of “the end of the free market,” explains the key logic behind state capitalism [this way](#): “The ultimate motive is not economic (maximizing growth) but political (maximizing the state’s power and the leadership’s chances of survival).”

That shift in calculus and political emphasis is a serious challenge to the global do-gooders at Davos, made all the more tricky by the seeming inability of many democratic, liberalized countries to reconcile the dilemmas of international crises alongside the concerns of national politics. A blogger writing on the website of the Washington-based Institute for Policy Studies suggests Davos, with its desire to promote “dialogue and leadership”, can provide a vital platform to [curing the rot](#):

A summit focused not on growth and competitiveness but on practical steps on issues such as debt reduction and institutional reform would be a good first start. Central to this must be real attempts to tackle the ‘seeds of dystopia’ at their source – even if this means asking difficult questions and hearing uncomfortable answers in the major financial capitals of the world. Those “practical steps” won’t emerge from this week’s WEF meeting. But one can safely assume there will be a lot uncomfortable questions aired — if not answered — behind Davos’s closed doors.

# Grading Obama's Foreign Policy

Eight experts rate the president's performance so far

January 23, 2012

## **Robert Kagan:**

On the accomplishment side of the ledger, credit Barack Obama with a very smart policy in Asia. By taking advantage of China overplaying its hand in the South China Sea and generally unnerving most of the region, the Obama administration has reconfirmed the central role of the United States in East Asia. The opening of a new base in Australia is a powerful symbol of America's enduring strategic presence in the region. The opening with Burma obviously has both strategic motives and strategic implications.

He also has a fairly good record in responding to the Arab Awakening. The Obama administration has fortunately ignored the "realists'" call for standing by the collapsing dictatorships in the Middle East. (How people can call themselves "realists" when advocating such hopelessly unrealistic policies is a source of wonderment.) In Egypt, especially, while the reaction to events has sometimes been slow, the administration has generally moved in the right direction. Obama deserves particular credit for not joining in the general panic at the electoral success of the Muslim Brotherhood. The operation in Libya was a success. The growing international pressure on Basha al-Assad in Syria is encouraging -- but eventually the United States will have to do more.

More generally, Obama has made steady moves in support of democracy. After treating it like a dirty word in its first year and a half, the administration has returned to a pro-democracy posture not only in the Middle East, but also in Russia and Asia. Given that the political evolution of countries in these regions will have a direct bearing on the international strategic situation and on the nature of world order in the coming years, this has been an eminently "realistic" approach.

As for setbacks, topping the list is Obama's failure to work out an agreement with Iraq to maintain a U.S. troop presence beyond the end of 2011. This has been a disaster and may prove to be one of the gravest

errors of Obama's first term, for which either he or his successor will pay a high price. If Iraq unravels into sectarian warfare, it could easily suck other regional powers into the conflict -- especially Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. Just as importantly, it would set back democratic progress in the region. Iraq is almost as much an anchor in the Arab world as Egypt. The decision to give up on the admittedly difficult negotiations with the Iraqis was clearly motivated by White House's desire to run on "ending" the war in Iraq. This was as unnecessary as it was unwise.

The decision to allow deep cuts in defense spending -- rather than addressing entitlements -- is equally irresponsible. Here the Obama administration and Congress are both to blame. But the Obama team has compounded the problem by elaborating a budget-driven defense strategy that is not commensurate with American strategic goals and interests. It is ironic that Obama is adopting Donald Rumsfeld's defense strategy -- high tech, light footprint. We will find, as we did in the Bush years, the Clinton years, and in many previous decades, that drones and missiles can only go so far in preserving American interests. If not reversed, the deep cuts looming in defense will go a long way to undermining the U.S. position in the world. They will even undercut the Obama administration's efforts to make the United States a more reliable player in Asia, despite its unconvincing protestations to the contrary.

Robert Kagan is senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. His new book, [The World America Made](#), will be published next month.

### **Anne-Marie Slaughter:**

Overall, Barack Obama has had a very good run on foreign policy, aided by his superstar secretary of state.

His greatest accomplishments are the successful intervention in Libya under the "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine; the institutionalization of the U.S. presence in the Asia-Pacific through membership in the East Asia Summit and much more active regional diplomacy; the creation of the G-20 as a permanent leaders' forum, thereby broadening the circles of decision to include many non-Western powers; the killing of Osama bin Laden and the decimation of al Qaeda; the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq and a firm commitment to withdraw from Afghanistan; the elevation of development (including food security, global health, climate change

issues, and economic growth) as a much bigger part of U.S. foreign policy; the restoration of trade as a meaningful foreign-policy tool by passing three trade agreements and setting up a framework for trans-Pacific free trade; the global defense of Internet freedom (assuming SOPA/PIPA do not pass in anything like their current form) and the transformation of the highly politicized debate about degrees of democratization into degrees of transparency, accountability, and citizen participation through the [Open Government Partnership](#).

Running through all these successes is a larger meta-achievement: The president has repositioned the United States to be a far more nimble, flexible, responsive and effective leader in world affairs. He is systematically divesting the burdens that weigh us down (two major wars), expanding the range of tools at our disposal (diplomatic, economic, developmental, environmental, and energy -- e.g. a new energy bureau at the State Department), and reorganizing and consolidating the parts that work (see his proposal for the Commerce Department and associated small agencies and the reorganization taking place at State).

The administration has also worked to establish and strengthen regional and global institutions that allow the United States to leverage its own efforts and to cooperate much more efficiently with others. Reinforcing a norm of global and regional responsibility for following international rules allows the United States to broker and support coalitions of nations in which other, more directly involved regional powers take the lead -- not only in Libya, but also with respect to France in the Ivory Coast, Turkey in Syria, the African Union in Somalia, and ASEAN nations in Southeast Asia. Call it the private equity approach to American foreign policy: nimble, flexible, adaptable, and responsive are all essential characteristics for success in the continually accelerating, complex system we call international affairs.

Obama's biggest failure has been the management of Israel -- not the failure to achieve a peace agreement, which is a serial failure on the part of many presidents -- but in framing the entire issue in such a way that once the United States had demanded an end to the settlements and Israel refused, any subsequent U.S. accommodation of Israel looks like capitulation to the very Muslim world that Obama set out to court. As a result, it is still not clear that Obama will accomplish one of his own top

goals: resetting the U.S. relationship with the Muslim communities around the world.

He has also failed to establish a consistent strategy for Pakistan, alternating between embrace and embarrassment in ways that often make our policy as inconsistent and frustrating as the Pakistanis are themselves. But at the moment it's hard to figure out even what our stated policy is, much less to implement it.

A third failure is harder to discern but potentially very damaging over the long term. In pivoting to Asia so publicly, without a counterbalancing emphasis on the enduring and indispensable U.S. partnership with Europe, he has created an opportunity for China to re-establish itself as the pivot power between the U.S. and Europe and once again become the Middle Kingdom. China and Europe are already each other's largest trading partners. Now, individual European countries such as Britain, Denmark, and Germany are actively courting Chinese investment and offering access to strategic minerals. China may yet become a principal banker for the eurozone (which is unlikely to give China direct leverage over European leaders any more than Chinese holdings of U.S. debt gives them leverage over us, but could open the door further to economic and even political relationships that could complicate U.S. diplomacy). It would have been far better to have pivoted toward Asia from a position of trans-Atlantic strength, deepening and intensifying ties across multiple continents throughout the Atlantic Basin.

Finally, for all of Obama's success using drones, the ultimate light, nimble and adaptable weapon, many of the precedents the United States setting with drone attacks will come back to haunt us. Now is the time to begin to develop an international consensus around rules governing drones and other means of individualized 21st-century warfare. Exulting in victory over the killing of individual terrorist suspects may feel good, but this is precisely the issue on which we need less celebration and more of the cool, cerebral analysis that the president is known for.

*Anne-Marie Slaughter is the Bert G. Kerstetter '66 University Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton University. She served as director of Policy Planning at the U.S. State Department from 2009-2011.*

**Joseph Cirincione:**

Barack Obama came out early and strong on nuclear policy, with initiatives that worked. A new treaty cut U.S. and Russian arsenals and restored critical, mutual inspections. Scores of nations agreed to lock up and even eliminate uranium and plutonium that terrorists could use to build weapons. Dozens of countries cooperated to pressure Iran and North Korea, slowing the nuclear programs of both. All strengthened U.S. national security.

But the Iranian and North Korean programs have not stopped; the materials are not yet secured; and U.S. and Russian arsenals still number in the thousands, with no new agreement in sight. The combination of competing crises, a resistant bureaucracy, political opposition, and reluctant partners has slowed progress to a crawl.

Obama's best chance to restore momentum is through a series of [options](#) the Pentagon has prepared on nuclear policy. He could choose the more ambitious path, cutting requirements to reduce Russia to rubble and, in so doing, save billions by cutting obsolete nuclear programs and strengthen his arguments against new states getting these weapons. Or he could punt, squandering his credibility, weakening his alliances, and increasing nuclear dangers.

It's his call.

*Joseph Cirincione is president of Ploughshares Fund.*

### **Danielle Pletka:**

Any short analysis of Barack Obama's successes and failures in foreign policy must necessarily be incomplete. Is it enough to weigh his undeniable good judgment in ordering Navy SEALs to take out Osama bin Laden against his vacillation when faced with the Arab Spring? His willingness to face reality vis-à-vis Iran versus his paralyzing missteps in promoting Israeli-Palestinian dialogue? Surely not.

But at the heart of what must, by the standards the president set for himself, be judged a failure, is what seems to be Obama's worst sin: The president's foreign policy lacks a guiding set of principles. Why surge troops into Afghanistan only to draw them down before the mission is complete? Why condemn Muammar al-Qaddafi in Libya for his crimes against his own people and remain almost indifferent to the same crimes

when committed by Bashar al-Assad in Syria? Why knock off a dozen al Qaeda terrorists from the air, and release another group from Guantánamo? The answer, of course, is politics. Politics matters to any sane politician; but when politics suffers no competition from principle, the nation's foreign policy is rudderless. It is why our allies mistrust us, our adversaries underestimate us, and why we no longer seek to shape a better world, but instead to retreat from it.

*Danielle Pletka is vice president for foreign and defense policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute.*

**Aaron David Miller:**

"Life's about learning," Crosby, Stills, and Nash sang in one of their better songs. Barack Obama has sure learned a lot of about foreign policy over the last 3 years, and nowhere more so than the Middle East. Wrongly convinced that antipathy toward his predecessor and his own powerful persona would position him well to transform the trajectory of the nation's foreign policy, he quickly learned the limits of engagement and the challenges of the cruel and unforgiving world he inherited. Indeed, in many ways Obama has morphed into a less reckless and certainly less ideological version of Bush 43 in the final years of his presidency: surging in Afghanistan, toughening policy toward Iran (and Syria), whacking more bad guys with predator drones in his first year than his predecessor did in his first term, and keeping the Guantánamo prison open.

The first president to inherit a shooting war in 40 years, Obama actually inherited two: He has been a wartime president from the get-go, and, like Woodrow Wilson, is the only other sitting American president with a war and a Nobel Peace Prize, however unearned. One reason the Republicans now have such a hard time attacking him on foreign policy is that the public knows his record on national security has been tough and effective enough.

Obama has been competent on foreign policy, with no spectacular achievements (save killing Osama) nor any galactic failures. And he's stayed out of trouble (see: his light-footprint Libya intervention). Obama has wisely gotten out of Iraq and unwisely gotten deeper into another quagmire in Afghanistan, where victory will sadly be determined not by

whether we can win, but by when can we leave. On Iran, he deserves credit for toughening sanctions, but in the cruelest of twists, may still end up being the American president on whose watch Iran gets the bomb. His policy toward the Arab-Israeli issue is marked by more enthusiasm than clear-headed thinking, and it shows.

On balance, Obama has been credible and able in foreign policy, but neither the brilliant foreign transformer nor transactional negotiator and crisis manager he wanted to be. He shouldn't take it personally; it's a cruel world out there.

*Aaron David Miller is public policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. His new book, Can America Have Another Great President?, will be published by Random House in 2012.*

### **Ted Galen Carpenter:**

President Obama has amassed a decidedly mixed record on foreign policy. He can boast of several worthwhile achievements during his first 3 years. He fulfilled the commitment to withdraw all U.S. forces from Iraq by the end of 2011, repaired much of the damage that the Bush administration had caused to America's relationship with the European democracies, and put the United States -- at least rhetorically -- on the right side of history regarding the Arab Awakening. His campaign to eliminate al Qaeda's leadership achieved numerous successes, most notably the killing of Osama Bin Laden. Relations with Russia, which had become quite tense during the Bush years, modestly improved.

Unfortunately, there were also major mistakes and disappointments. His worst blunder was the decision to expand the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan and intensify the futile nation-building mission in that pre-industrial, tribal society. Obama's policy toward Iran, despite an encouraging initial effort to establish a meaningful dialogue with Tehran, has resumed the same counterproductive, confrontational path of his predecessors. Tensions with Pakistan have risen sharply, as have tensions in America's most important relationship, with China. The Obama administration has also been slow to respond constructively to the mounting drug violence next door in Mexico, continuing instead to pursue a failed prohibitionist policy that enriches the drug cartels.

Finally, Obama has shown little inclination to adjust the overall U.S. security strategy to reflect America's increasingly precarious financial position. The president seems as willing as his predecessors to tolerate -- indeed, encourage -- U.S. allies to free-ride on Washington's security efforts. Even more disappointing, there has been little apparent recognition that U.S. power is limited and that there is an urgent need to set priorities and prune less essential commitments. That is perhaps the biggest failure of Obama's foreign policy thus far.

*Ted Galen Carpenter, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, is the [author](#) of eight books on international affairs.*

### **Jamie Fly:**

As Barack Obama seeks reelection, he will likely tout the country's counterterrorism successes under his watch and, in a sop to his base, his ending of the war in Iraq and his efforts to wind down the war in Afghanistan. Although voters in 2012 will be focused primarily on the state of the economy, they should consider who is best suited to defend the country and advance America's interests as commander chief when choosing whether to reelect Obama or bring in a new president.

The Obama administration does have achievements to point to in the war against al Qaeda and affiliated groups -- the killing of Osama bin Laden by U.S. Navy SEALs chief among them. But the war on terror must remain a focus for the next president, whoever it is. Obama, by deemphasizing the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in favor of deniable covert efforts, has put the country at risk of being drawn back into both theaters because of his unwillingness to finish the job begun by his predecessor.

So too is the situation with rogue regimes that threaten America and its allies. The West's confrontation with Iran is nearing a critical juncture as Iran approaches a nuclear weapons capability. Syria, Iran's closest ally, is wracked by what many observers now describe as a civil war. The broader Middle East is in turmoil in the wake of last year's momentous developments. North Korea, under the new leadership of Kim Jong Un, still challenges the stability of East Asia.

Meanwhile, rising and resurgent powers such as China and Russia continue to undermine American interests. Obama has rightfully begun to devote

more American diplomatic and military attention to Asia to deal with China's rise, but has pursued a wrongheaded "reset" policy with Russia that does not reflect the true nature of the Russian government, now facing its own popular uprising. On each of these issues, the Obama administration has refused to take assertive action, instead managing on the margins. In his first three years in office, Obama has made several correct tactical decisions, but he seems to lack an appreciation of America's unique role in the world and a coherent vision for the use of U.S. power and influence. What the country needs from its next president is a leader who can shape world events rather than be shaped by them. There is little to indicate that this is Barack Obama's interest or aptitude.

*Jamie M. Fly is executive director of the Foreign Policy Initiative.*

### **Heather Hurlburt:**

Barack Obama's list of achievements on foreign policy and national security is long, but also diffuse. Many are good starts on works in progress. The misses, while smaller, are specific and painful.

Achievements:

1. Winding down the Bush wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.
2. Making counterterrorism quieter and more successful -- decimating al Qaeda central, including Osama bin Laden.
3. Activating the G-20 and using it to keep the world economy out of recession in 2009.
4. Resetting relations with Russia --even as we fight in public, cooperation continues on Afghanistan overflights, nuclear arms control and disarmament, and getting Russia into the WTO.
5. Steadying relations with Asia -- not just the much-ballyhooed "pivot" but specifically building a new confidence among our core Asian allies -- Australia, Japan, South Korea -- while managing a very challenging period with China and making innovative moves in Burma and economic policy.
6. Moving U.S. military strategy and funding into the post-post-9/11 era with a considered strategic refocusing, a reconsideration of the role and scope of U.S. nuclear and ground forces, while keeping our promises to veterans, funding and defending the New GI bill, and undertaking the most significant Veterans' Administration reforms in a generation.

7. Rebuilding U.S. multilateral credibility, at the United Nations and elsewhere.

8. South Sudanese independence, which went off relatively peacefully in no small part due to Obama and U.N. ambassador Susan Rice's intervention at the U.N. last fall.

9. Infusing U.S. human rights policy with new credibility on responding to mass atrocities, LGBT issues, women in conflict; using U.S. activism in the U.N. Human Rights Council to improve its effectiveness dramatically.

10. Keeping the United States relevant to the Arab Spring. By choosing to ease out Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, play a key enabling role in the Libya intervention, and work hard if not so successfully behind the scenes in Bahrain and Yemen, Washington kept itself relevant to the conversation in a changing Arab world -- no small achievement, despite how far short it falls of hopes both there and here.

Missed Opportunities:

1. A durable legal architecture for counterterrorism. Few in or out of the administration foresaw the ferocity of opposition to closing the Guantánamo Bay prison or to civilian trials for terror suspects. In response, the administration decided not to expend political capital to finish cleaning up its inherited mess, or to release advisory opinions and decision-making processes on drones, targeted killings, and other features of the new counterterrorism approach. However politically sensible these choices in the short run, they create both legal and political vacuums that have allowed its opponents to put even torture back on the table -- and may open the door for actions by future administrations that we will all live to regret.

2. Middle East peace. Nothing Obama did in 2009 and 2010 could have made Benjamin Netanyahu or Mahmoud Abbas a different politician, but the United States did not have to wind up in quite as deep a hole as we now find ourselves.

3. Civil-military rebalancing. The time legions of good people took to write new diplomacy and development policies, and staff up USAID, absorbed the moment where significant resource and issue transfers to the civilian agencies were financially possible. Sure, this is a boring bureaucratic issue, but, in a world dominated by economic power, also a vital one.

4. Foundations of U.S. strength. As with Guantánamo, Congress must bear the lion's share of the blame for last summer's embarrassing debt-ceiling

posturing and the even-more embarrassing failure of the "super-committee" set up to find budget cuts palatable to both sides of the aisle. But given the black eye the fracas (not to mention the too-small stimulus and its too-small results) has given to confidence in U.S. leadership abroad as well as at home, the administration must share the blame.

The Jury Is Still Out:

1. Iran, North Korea, and nonproliferation writ large. Can the combination of pressure now and promised inducements later pay off in peacefully moving either Iran or North Korea off the nuclear track? Can a second-term president with a solidly conservative Congress make good on the expansive promise of his 2009 nonproliferation agenda?
2. The global economy. The 2009 activism was major -- but can a second-term Obama begin to enunciate a vision for globalization after the crash, and muster domestic support for U.S. leadership in it?
3. Climate change. Both international and domestic processes are in sore need of a new spark -- can this administration provide it, or respond productively if someone else does?

*Heather Hurlburt is executive director of the National Security Network.*