

The Responsibility Doctrine

In today's interconnected world, the United States needs partners to help bolster the global economy, prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, stem climate change, alleviate poverty, and destroy terrorist networks. U.S. peace and prosperity very often hinge on getting other countries to step up. This has led the Obama administration to pursue a strategy—call it the “responsibility doctrine”—of prodding other influential nations (especially the pivotal BRICS countries of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) to help shoulder the burden of fostering a stable, peaceful world order that delivers security and prosperity.¹ With a more concerted and systematic push than widely recognized, the Obama administration has sought contributions from other nations to help address an extensive range of global challenges. Through incentives, cajoling, and coercion, it has made the pursuit of American-led collective action a hallmark of its foreign policy.

Pushing for other nations to contribute is not, in itself, a major innovation in American foreign policy. But today, it's increasingly mandatory and also more difficult. Other influential nations are more capable and less easily coerced. Nevertheless, the administration has met with some success, more than generally credited. While examples of deep, sustained pivotal power cooperation remain rare, and many serious differences separate them, the vision of a world where the United States leads major powers to work together to reach joint goals is not pure imagination. It is happening.

Nina Hachigian is a Senior Fellow at the Center for American Progress. She is the co-author of *The Next American Century: How the US Can Thrive as Other Powers Rise* and worked on the staff of the National Security Council under President Clinton. She can be reached at nhachigian@americanprogress.org or @NinaHachigian on Twitter. David Shorr is a program officer at the Stanley Foundation. Contact him at David.Shorr@gmail.com or follow on Twitter @David_Shorr. They would like to thank Shadi Hamid, Daniel Kurtz-Phelan, and Anne-Marie Slaughter for their useful comments and suggestions. The views expressed herein are their own.

Copyright © 2013 Center for Strategic and International Studies
The Washington Quarterly • 36:1 pp. 73–91
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2013.751652>

U.S. peace and prosperity very often hinge on getting other countries to step up.

To make further progress, the United States must continue its persistent efforts to get other powers to assume greater responsibility, marshal the pressure that will elicit more contributions, and demonstrate to detractors here at home that luring more players onto the field is a sign of successful international leadership, not weakness.

Why the Responsibility Doctrine?

From the time he took office, President Obama emphasized that even a global superpower cannot respond effectively to 21st-century challenges on its own. As he put it in his inaugural address, “our power alone cannot protect us.”² Later that year at a meeting with Chinese officials, he stated more specifically: “Our ability to partner with each other is a pre-requisite for progress on many of the most pressing global challenges.”³

Recent experience has reinforced the point. Only through coordinating their actions were the major economic players able to keep the world economy from a more serious meltdown in 2008–09. Law enforcement cooperation with other nations has proven essential to disrupt terrorist plots. Any climate change solution needs China’s and India’s full participation to stand a chance. Only by working together were nations able to slow a rampant swine flu contagion and place weapons-usable nuclear material around the world under tighter security.

President Obama stressed the need for collaboration in his transmission letter for his 2010 National Security Strategy. Warning against possible overstretch if the United States tries to single-handedly assume the full weight of the world’s challenges, he drew an analogy with America’s post-WWII posture:

We were part of the most powerful wartime coalition in human history through World War II, and stitched together a community of free nations and institutions to endure a Cold War. We are clear-eyed about the challenge of mobilizing collective action, and the shortfalls of our international system. But America has not succeeded by stepping outside the currents of international cooperation. We have succeeded by steering those currents in the direction of liberty and justice—so that nations thrive by meeting their responsibilities and face consequences when they don’t.⁴

This passage highlights a key tenet of the administration’s policies: both foreign and domestic responsibility.⁵ As the United States puts a higher premium on cooperation, it expects contributions in return from other nations. With a distinctive ongoing role as a global leader, it will put great effort into bringing others along and offer its own cooperation for reasons of self-interest as well as broader peace and prosperity. But it will not play the sucker.

There is an important argument about fairness here, one with strong resonance in the U.S. electorate. Why should the United States contribute disproportionately to public goods as others enjoy growing success within the international system? And even if the United States were inclined to continue picking up the whole tab for protecting the global commons and tamping down international crises, grim fiscal realities are sinking in. With needs at home, the United States simply cannot afford to be everywhere and do everything. It must leverage its own efforts by combining them with assistance from elsewhere. There is another reason to insist on contributions for the collective good: the international order needs to tap the dynamism of its rising stars to thrive, or even survive. The best way to be sure they are committed is to insist that they contribute—whether financially or through constructive political leadership—toward the global order’s maintenance and improvement.

Finally, the Iraq war offers pertinent lessons. When initiatives do not go as planned, the United States needs partners to help pick up the pieces. As the near-sole initiator and proprietor of the Iraq War, the United States has been saddled with the \$3 trillion price tag. This financial cost, not to mention the human toll in blood and upheaval, begs a comparison with the first Gulf War of 1991, which enjoyed so much international legitimacy and support that the United States was actually reimbursed for most of its costs. International cooperation not only boosts the prospects for success in many cases, it helps spread the material burden, regardless of success or failure.

Consequently, the responsibility doctrine rests on a strategic premise that emerging major and middle powers could and should become significant contributors to global peace and prosperity—co-opted or pressed into accepting responsibility along with power. While recognizing that emerging powers such as Brazil, China, and India are not simply going to sign up to the Western-led status quo order, the Obama administration has nonetheless been steadily pushing them to start contributing more toward global public goods. The United States’ close traditional alliances with nations that share democratic values remain the bedrock of this policy in many ways. Yet, there is a strong case for bringing diverse powers into closer alignment as a major thrust of American foreign policy, as they are essential players in addressing our major threats and challenges. At the same time, because geostrategic rivalry naturally continues to feature in these relationships, the balancing act involves disagreeing fiercely on some issues while continuing to work together on others.

It’s a unique condition of our modern era that emerging powers bear inescapable global responsibilities. What makes them obligatory stewards of the global order? U.S. officials have pointed to a variety of sources: first, from their debt, as emerging powers have benefitted enormously from the existing order; second, from their self-interest, because they still benefit and have a large

stake in solving problems; third, from their status as problem-makers, as they have become recently in the case of global warming; and, finally, from their having a capacity that is often lacking in the least developed nations.

What sort of responsibility does the United States seek from pivotal powers? At the broadest level, the goal of the strategy is to create a better world for Americans and all others by creating opportunity, keeping order, and addressing common threats to humanity such as global warming, nuclear proliferation, protectionism, pandemic diseases, and regional instability. The United States seeks meaningful contributions of ideas, money, personnel, relationships, leadership, and other assistance to solve common problems. Without collective action, the diplomatic free market will not produce “goods” like a strong nonproliferation norm or balanced economic growth. This means pivotal powers should act to strengthen the international architecture of institutions and rules (like the UN, WTO, IMF, etc.) by working within the system, improving it, following the rules, and being willing to punish those who don’t.

Naturally, some powers will be leery of rules and institutions they did not have a hand in developing. Thus the burden sometimes falls upon the United States and other established powers to make the case for the current set of rules or to be willing to update regimes that warrant adjustment. The United States has to balance its need for decisive action to solve corrosive problems with the patience to let the system adapt to new powers—and the patience to allow those powers to begin to appreciate the existing regime over time, based on their own experience.

Producing global public goods upon which order depends drives the responsibility doctrine.

This strategy sets the United States’ aims high when it comes to achieving progress under the world’s shifting power structure. Such foreign policy fundamentals—like preserving the network of post-War alliances and keeping China’s rise from being a disruptive force—are necessary tasks, but insufficient. Under a responsibility

doctrine, foreign policy is driven by the need to produce the global public goods on which a viable 21st-century rules-based order depends. The goal is to align that order for collective problem-solving, not just keep it in balance.

Executing the Responsibility Doctrine

The responsibility doctrine has shaped the Obama administration’s interactions with the BRICS and others. Even standard elements of statecraft—bilateral relations, balancing interests and values—have a distinct rationale under this

framework. For the last four years, U.S. foreign policymakers have implemented the doctrine in a variety of ways, using at least a dozen tactical methods to manage key bilateral relationships with emerging powers, spur these other nations to greater responsibility, and impose consequences when they don't. Yet nowhere have these

measures been systematically identified and presented to show how, together, they constitute a major thread of American policy. The catalogue below is offered as a corrective.

These methods (at least a dozen) have not been systematically identified and presented before.

Building up Strategic Relationships

Since rising global and regional powers increasingly wield decisive influence as diplomatic swing voters in the international system, the responsibility doctrine includes systematic efforts to thicken the bonds between the United States and emerging powers as well as, importantly, to institutionalize them, while at the same time strengthening and deepening ties to traditional allies. This has meant elevating emerging power relationships, investing time and attention in them, and creating new channels for dialogue. Such multi-agency dialogues, summits, and other fora like the Global Partnership Dialogue with Brazil, Strategic Dialogue with South Africa, and Comprehensive Partnership with Indonesia give U.S. officials added opportunity to know their counterparts. Intensive discussions give them a chance to draw their colleagues out and thereby gain insight into pivotal power motives, frameworks, and doctrine, but they are also important to establish the kind of workaday contacts that are essential for ongoing cooperation. These processes also provide a setting—and calendar—to track old commitments and set timelines for new ones. Finally, they require the United States to coordinate its own policies toward a given nation across many departments, agencies, and issue areas.

The U.S. relationship with India offers one example. The Obama administration has invested a great deal of attention and resources into this important “strategic partnership.”⁶ In 2010, the United States and India initiated a broad-based “Strategic Dialogue,” led by the U.S. Secretary of State and the Indian External Affairs Minister, that each year brings together numerous U.S. and Indian officials from issue areas across the two governments. In addition, they established a wealth of narrower self-contained forums at the working level, such as a new Green Partnership, Agricultural Dialogue, Health Dialogue, Partnership on Innovation, CEO and women’s forums, among others. As a sign of the importance the administration assigns to the relationship,

President Obama used his 2010 visit to India to signal U.S. support for Delhi's bid to be a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

With China, it has been a matter of thickening an already dense web of existing channels. The "Strategic Economic Dialogue" initiated by the second Bush administration became the "Strategic & Economic Dialogue" under Obama—adding the geopolitical portfolio and the Secretary of State as a leader of the process, along with the Secretary of the Treasury. In 2012, the United States and China also inaugurated the "Strategic Security Dialogue" to tackle the toughest issues at the nexus of political and military affairs. Relatedly, the United States has worked to maintain military-to-military channels with the People's Liberation Army (PLA), though these dialogues have yet to bear real fruit. The Obama administration worked to restart the Human Rights Dialogue that had stalled and created with China a Latin America Dialogue, an Africa Dialogue, an agricultural forum, and a clean energy partnership, among many other bilateral forums. At the topmost level, President Obama met with President Hu twelve times.

For U.S.–Russia relations, the challenge was to reverse the downward slide of antagonism. The now famous "reset" was essentially an effort to cooperate with Russia on those issues where Washington and Moscow had common ground. This resulted in an historic arms reduction treaty with inspections, assistance on curbing Iran's nuclear ambitions (in part by cancelling the sale of an advanced air defense system to Tehran), and an important supply route for the NATO operation in Afghanistan. Having an alternate supply route besides Pakistan may have been a factor in freeing President Obama's hand to order the operation against Osama Bin Laden.⁷

Compartmentalizing

Obama Administration officials have been able to make progress with Russia and China, despite serious differences, because they have compartmentalized issues on the bilateral agenda. It is inherent in relationships between large, complex countries that disputes and rivalry will surface regularly. This tension is nothing new, but as a greater number of countries are able to wield significant influence on the international stage, these tensions will likely arise with more regularity, and relationships with more countries will need to be compartmentalized and nuanced.

Recent experience shows that, despite political tendencies to characterize entire relationships as friendly or hostile, joint work can proceed in one arena while disputes flare in others. For example, in March 2012, while the Obama administration was filling a number of cases against China for erecting trade barriers—and meeting with Beijing's vehement objections—the two countries were nonetheless closely cooperating on a diplomatic strategy for returning

North Korea to talks on denuclearization. An even more vivid example was the delicate diplomacy in April 2012 over the fate of dissident Chen Guangcheng while the Strategic and Economic Dialogue proceeded as planned. In that same month, despite India vaulting to the top of the list of Iran's energy customers, U.S. and Indian officials met with their Japanese counterparts as part of a trilateral dialogue on geopolitics in Asia. And despite the deeply troubling rollback of democratic reforms in Russia, its assistance with Iran and supply routes to Afghanistan remain crucial.

Peer Pressure

Another technique to implement the responsibility doctrine is to build coalitions with other nations to shape a country's behavior. This has long been the bread and butter of statecraft, but the administration is bringing it to a new level to enlist the support of emerging powers. Sometimes this entails a concerted effort and sometimes it is more opportunistic, merely a matter of exploiting openings. International organizations and, increasingly, regional bodies often provide the right context. Three episodes involving China illustrate this approach.

In 2009 and 2010, China made a series of surprisingly aggressive moves with regard to its territorial claims in the South China Sea. The United States swiftly provided reassurance to rattled Southeast Asian nations, playing its traditional American role of security guarantor in the Pacific. The issue came to a head at a July 2010 meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Hanoi, where Secretary of State Hillary Clinton joined other ASEAN members in a forceful and united message that a multilateral solution to South China Sea disputes was preferable to Beijing's bilateral approach.⁸ Beijing has since backed down to some degree and has increasingly framed its arguments in this area with reference to international standards and law.

The Obama administration used a similar calculus to gain China's support for tough UN sanctions against Iran enacted in June 2010. China's and Russia's votes in the Security Council were both crucial to enact sanctions. Yet, Washington viewed Russian support as a "two-fer," since getting Moscow's endorsement first would virtually guarantee that China would go along—if only to keep from becoming isolated in the international community. Indeed, closer cooperation with Russia on Iran was one of the biggest payoffs of the administration's reset of bilateral relations.

On the value of China's currency, the renminbi, the Obama administration has also rallied peer pressure with some success. First, it encouraged other countries like Brazil and Indonesia to step up and speak about the harm the undervaluation of the renminbi was causing their export economies instead of letting the United States alone press that message with the Chinese. Then the

United States further “multilateralized” the issue of China’s currency by making it a discussion item at the G-20 forum beginning in June 2010, over Chinese objections. As a result, the Chinese have tried to ease pressure by appreciating their currency just prior to G-20 meetings (although Beijing can also turn the table, using the November 2010 G-20 meeting in Seoul to scrutinize America’s own policy of quantitative easing).

Playing to Their Politics

The Obama administration also carefully considers how to make its case for the responsible actions it is pressing in light of domestic politics in other countries. No foreign leaders want to be seen as doing the bidding of the United States, especially in China and other emerging economies. Thus, when U.S. officials argue the need for China to rebalance its economy away from exports and investment and toward domestic consumption, they refer less frequently to the health of the U.S. economy or global economy, and more frequently to the fact that China’s own Five-Year Plan for economic growth calls for exactly this shift.⁹

Welcoming New Leadership

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s notion of a “multi-partner world”—in which the United States joins in varied forms of cooperation with a wider set of partners—captures the Obama administration’s basic operating mode under the responsibility doctrine.¹⁰ To make it work, other nations will need to help conceive, execute, and share in the credit for joint operations. Rather than resenting that, or deriding it as “leading from behind,” the United States should see it as a sign of leadership success.

The shift is most conspicuous when nations play new roles at the forefront of high-profile issues. NATO’s “Unified Protector” operation against Muammar Qaddafi in Libya was a case in point. There was a concerted effort to spread responsibilities and burdens for the operation, as President Obama encouraged European allies to supply hard power and not depend solely on U.S. military capabilities (though the United States was still the very long pole in that tent). In exchange, President Sarkozy of France and other European leaders shared credit for leading an international coalition to stop the slaughter of innocents. Subsequent comments from Obama have pinpointed these partners’ commitment as a major concern and consideration for his own decision: “What I didn’t want,” Obama said in an interview with *Vanity Fair*, “is a month later a call from our allies saying, ‘It’s not working—you need to do more.’ So the question is: How can I cabin our commitment in a way that is useful?”¹¹

According to critics of the policy, any leadership role played by others comes at the expense of American prestige and influence.¹² These commentators seem to have forgotten President Reagan’s favorite dictum that “there is no limit to

what a man can do . . . if he does not mind who gets the credit.”¹³ They have taken such delight in the phrase “leading from behind” that they miss the real point. In practice, the Obama administration is leading from every direction—front, center, side, top, back—using whatever form will get the job done.

As illustrated by the flap over the 2010 Turkish and Brazilian attempt to mediate the Iranian nuclear dispute, collaborative leadership is not easy to orchestrate. While President Obama’s reaction is usually portrayed as simply a rebuke of Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan and then-Brazilian President Lula for meddling in the superpower’s business, in fact, it was a rejection of a deal with serious shortcomings, not of their attempt to take a leading role. In autumn 2009, international negotiators had hammered out a nuclear fuel-swap agreement that would have left Iran without the makings of a bomb. When the talks fizzled within just weeks, the administration started to line up support for new sanctions. Six months later, with a UN vote on sanctions looming, the Brazilian and Turkish leaders made a last-ditch effort to resurrect the fuel swap. While the mediators did elicit an agreement from Iranian leaders, the failure to account for growth in the stockpile since the previous autumn would have left Iran with too much enriched uranium to serve as an effective constraint. The key lesson for emerging powers trying to help solve a sensitive high-stakes problem is that they will be judged on the basis of results rather than effort or good intentions.

Besides, when we track Turkey’s subsequent posture with respect to Iran, things look different. When Turkey played host to the next round of talks in January 2011, Iran’s intransigence at the meeting further tipped world sentiment against Tehran. In September of that year, Turkey acceded to Washington’s request for NATO missile defense systems, presumably directed toward Iran, to be based on its soil. And U.S.–Turkish coordination has improved markedly compared with two years ago; just prior to a round of talks in April 2012, President Obama used Prime Minister Erdogan as an intermediary to pass a message to Iran’s supreme leader.

The administration is working with other emerging powers to launch new multilateral efforts as well. For example, the Brazilian government and the administration have been collaborating closely in the Open Government Partnership to promote transparency. The United States has also encouraged emerging powers to serve as hosts and chairs of key multilateral conferences and summits to encourage their ownership of success or failure. Mexico and South Africa’s recent terms as chairs of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change count as contributions of global public goods. The Mexican chair of the 2010 UN climate conference took an important stand to keep Bolivia—the conference’s sole dissenter—from blocking agreement. Mexico was also the most recent chair of the G-20.

Similarly, it is not a coincidence that South Korea has hosted two major conclaves in recent years: a G-20 summit in November 2010 and the second Nuclear Security Summit in March 2012 (part of President Obama's global push to ensure nuclear material is kept out of reach of terror networks). These high-profile convocations reflect both South Korea's growing stature and the confidence in Washington as well as elsewhere that South Korea can play an important role supporting the international system.

Rule-making

Emerging powers often begin with a resistance to rules they had no hand in making. Thus, having their input at the drafting table for new rules is a key step in encouraging responsible behavior. For example, U.S. officials have suggested that because China was a charter member of the new Financial Stability Board (FSB), it refrained from making its usual argument about needing, as a developing country, a separate set of rules under the FSB's effort to tighten and harmonize financial regulations.

Beijing has also used this argument—that it deserves a separate set of rules—on climate, but the recent years of climate negotiations offer an instructive example for how to involve emerging powers in forging a cohesive framework, leading to a steady trickle of incremental progress. Given the chaotic atmosphere at the December 2009 Copenhagen meeting, its achievements are too often overlooked. Thanks to the personal intervention of President Obama, this round of talks solidified China's and India's first-ever commitments to cut the proportional carbon intensity of their economic growth, and China relented on its prior resistance to measurement and reporting of progress. Nations also committed to the aggregate goal of a temperature increase less than 2°C (or 3.6°F) compared with the pre-industrial climate. Subsequent rounds of negotiations have been hammering out the details of facilities for climate change financing, how to measure emissions, and a deadline to conclude an agreement. While trying to reconcile the demands of emerging and developed countries is frustrating, and the calls from developing countries for less responsibility have not gone away, emerging powers have to be at the table in order to develop a regime that they will follow, and thus that will actually work.

Leveraging International Institutions

One reason that the administration has greatly increased U.S. engagement with international institutions is that many of these organizations have built-in mechanisms to spread the burdens for public goods. Thus, at the UN, many countries contribute to the force of over 100,000 peace-keepers whose deployment benefits the United States by preserving stability in a slew of conflict-torn countries. At the IMF, for every dollar the United States lends the institution for a bail-out fund, others lend about \$5.

Over time, the increased stature of emerging powers will spur the reform of key multilateral venues. What is critical is to ensure that increased responsibility and contributions are linked to enhanced influence. In some institutions, the two are linked explicitly. At the IMF, for example, an increase in voting shares triggers an increase in mandated contributions. In other venues, the United States is molding institutions so the inclusion of newer powers will induce greater contributions. This is the case with the emergence of the G-20 as an ongoing leader-level summit. The group has important symbolism in gathering emerging and established powers as peer equals, and rising powers have actually led the G-20 into new areas like economic development and anti-corruption. One of the significant initiatives in the G-20 has been to reform the governance of international financial institutions, for instance to give emerging economies more clout in the IMF (though the United States has been tardy in ratifying the 2010 agreement on reapportionment of quota shares).¹⁴ The Mutual Assessment Process at the G-20 requires all participants to subject their domestic economic performance and policy to the scrutiny of the group, with the aim of highlighting how they may be hindering a strong global economy and, conversely, where opportunities exist to reap greater gains.

In some cases, in order to induce responsible action, the United States will devise exclusive institutions where a promise of responsibility itself is the price of admission. Such a structure can prevent free-riding altogether, as it is designed as a vehicle for collective action among the like-minded. It can also provide incentives for others to become more responsible in order to participate. An example is the Obama administration's Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) initiative. This new trade arrangement has set high standards for labor, environmental, and intellectual property protections, among other areas. Only countries who agree to meet these thresholds may negotiate their entry. Asia's largest trading partner, China, currently falls short. Thus, officials hope that the TPP might provide Beijing an added incentive to improve its conduct in these areas and become eligible.¹⁵

In the case of Syria, the administration has sought to induce responsibility within the UN by confronting it with a test of its own basic credibility. For example, in March 2012, the UN Security Council debated a resolution to endorse the Arab League peace plan, which called for Syrian President Bashar Al Assad to step down and hand power over to his deputy as well as for other countries to stop shipping arms to Syria. Before the vote, Secretary of State Clinton made her case: "The alternative—spurning the Arab League, abandoning the Syrian people, emboldening the dictator—would compound this tragedy and would mark a failure of our shared responsibility and shake the credibility of the United Nations Security Council."¹⁶ No doubt, U.S. negotiators presented even more emphatic versions of this argument behind closed doors.

Nevertheless, as events demonstrated (and as we discuss below), given that Russia and China vetoed the resolution, this tactic does not always work.

Leading by Example

The Obama administration has been explicit about the need for the United States to make its own gestures on key issues to maintain credibility and provide an example, as it calls on others to do their civic duty on behalf of the wider international community. On nuclear nonproliferation, for example, this is the connection that links reductions in the U.S. arsenal to efforts to stem the spread of nuclear weapons to more countries. Given that five countries already had the bomb when the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was negotiated in the late 1960s, the treaty struck a grand bargain requiring, among other things, a) that non-nuclear weapon nations remain that way and b) that the world's nuclear "haves" disarm. In order to win international support and keep the diplomatic upper hand with Iran and North Korea, the United States must show good faith in reducing our holdover Cold War arsenal of thousands of nukes. To their credit, senior Republicans on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, such as then-Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN) and Johnny Isakson (R-GA), acknowledged this point in their statements of support for ratification of the U.S.–Russian New START arms treaty.¹⁷

Financial regulatory reform—particularly regulation of the derivatives market—is another realm in which domestic U.S. actions help serve as spurs for progress in international settings like the G-20. As we saw during the recent meltdown, the pool of risk that accumulated through the growth of derivatives contracts rather than spreading risk represented a major vulnerability of the global financial system. The 2010 Dodd–Frank Law mandates that such contracts be cleared in the same way as other financial exchanges and subject to capital requirements.

Resistance by political opposition in Congress has severely hampered President Obama in a number of policy areas that have major implications for America's international credibility. On greenhouse gas emissions, he has worked through the executive branch as an alternative to the preferred path of legislation. To curb carbon emissions, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) developed standards for any new power plants, and the administration also dramatically increased fuel efficiency standards for cars and trucks. Hopefully, efforts toward Senate ratification of the Law of the Sea will continue now that the charged election season has passed.

Enforcement

What happens when a major power doesn't accept its responsibility to the degree the United States considers adequate in a given area? In addition to the mechanisms discussed above, the Obama administration has made other efforts

at strengthening enforcement. When an international regime provides an enforcement mechanism, the Obama administration has made considerable use of it. For example, the administration brought more major trade cases against China via the WTO dispute mechanism than any other administration. These cases are carefully designed to push China toward accepting international trade standards. Interestingly, according to U.S. officials, when the WTO has ruled against it, China has corrected its behavior quickly.¹⁸

In at least one case, the United States brought about unilateral sanctions as an additional prod to emerging powers to enforce sanctions against Iran. The administration has done this through U.S. legislation that punishes companies who violate the UN sanctions regime. Starting in 2004, new arrangements between the intelligence community and the Treasury Department enabled its Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence to track financial transactions throughout the world.¹⁹ One of the key moves to tighten sanctions, enacted by Congress in December 2011, bans banks that do business with Iran's central bank from operating in the United States.²⁰ Since American banks function as the backbone of the global financial system, this is a serious penalty, one that the Obama Administration has used. In July 2012, for example, the United States sanctioned a Chinese bank (along with an Iraqi one) by cutting it off completely from the U.S. financial system for providing financial services to Iran.

Withholding

In another angle on enforcement, at times the United States has pulled back on some of its contributions to public goods, or has threatened to, to induce others to do their part. The NATO allies have argued for decades over Western Europeans' meager investment in military capability. While the Libya intervention was an important display of European leadership, it also highlighted serious gaps in European hard power. Much of the problem stems from the moral hazard of relying on the sizable U.S. military presence in Europe, and Washington is responding with reductions in that presence such as a planned withdrawal of 10,000 personnel from Germany by 2015.

The Responsibility Message

Public diplomacy and a consistent message about the duties of membership in the world community are also essential to the responsibility doctrine. For many of the United States' top international priorities, putting arguments in terms of civic obligations and the rules of the road help make the strongest case for others to follow America's lead. Recent

The aim of the responsibility doctrine is to keep other nations from free-riding.

debates regarding U.S. strength or weakness in foreign policy spur us to restate the obvious: other governments do not respond positively to appeals that are based purely on insistence and bluster.

The public diplomacy of mutual responsibility reinforces ideas about obligations to the global common good across a variety of issues. These themes have been a drumbeat of the foreign policy message throughout the last four years. In his first address to the UN General Assembly in September 2009, President Obama first listed all of his early steps to bring the United States into better sync with the rest of the world, then said:

Some of our actions have yielded progress. Some have laid the groundwork for progress in the future. But make no mistake: This cannot solely be America's endeavor. Those who used to chastise America for acting alone in the world cannot now stand by and wait for America to solve the world's problems alone. We have sought—in word and deed—a new era of engagement with the world. And now is the time for all of the United States to take our share of responsibility for a global response to global challenges.²¹

In March of 2012, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton discussed U.S.–China relations in similar terms in an address at the United States Institute of Peace. Her argument picks up the thread from former Deputy Secretary Robert Zoellick's famous "Responsible Stakeholder" speech in 2005:

And I've pointed out to my counterparts China's response at times has been to seek to have it both ways, acting like what I call a selective stakeholder. In some forums, on some issues, China wants to be treated as a great power; in others, as a developing nation. That's perfectly understandable, because China has attributes of both. Nonetheless, the world is looking for China to play a role that is commensurate with its new standing. And that means it can no longer be a selective stakeholder.²²

To a great extent, the aim of the responsibility doctrine is to keep other nations from free-riding in the international system and leaving all the maintenance work to the United States. President Obama framed the need for continued pressure on

Iran and North Korea in his famous April 2009 Prague speech calling for a world without nuclear weapons: "Rules must be binding. Violations must be punished. Words must mean something. The world must stand together to prevent the spread of these weapons. Now is the time for a strong international response."²³

Emerging major and middle powers are gradually gaining a sense of ownership.

Calling Out the Irresponsible

As this passage suggests, the loud and clear message of responsibility is equally important when countries do not step up. The Syria debate at the UN illustrates

a specific instance of this tactic. When Russia and China vetoed the UN resolution aimed at preventing further violence in Syria, the United States and its partners did not let them off easily. “It’s quite distressing to see two permanent members of the Security Council using their veto while people are being murdered—women, children, brave young men—houses are being destroyed,” Secretary Clinton said in a blunt February 2012 statement publicized around the world. “It is just despicable and I ask whose side are they on? They are clearly not on the side of the Syrian people.”²⁴

Similarly, U.S. ambassador Susan Rice declared she was “disgusted” by the Russian–Chinese veto, adding that “any further bloodshed that flows will be on their hands.”²⁵ Plenty of non-American voices subsequently joined the chorus. French then-President Nicolas Sarkozy said it would encourage further violence by the Syrian regime. British Foreign Secretary William Hague said Russia and China had “sided with the Syrian regime and its brutal suppression of the Syrian people in support of their own national interests.” The U.N. ambassador of Morocco, the sole Arab member of the UNSC, voiced his “great regret and disappointment” at the double veto, while Italian Foreign Minister Giulio Terzi termed it “very bad news.”²⁶

This public shaming did not sit well in Beijing and Moscow, and they were somewhat more forthcoming in the months that followed. In fact, China offered its own four-point plan for solving the Syrian crisis in early November 2012. While observers found the plan vague, it was a significant milestone for China’s path to global stewardship in that its leaders realized they could not simply block efforts by the west to address the bloody civil war—they needed to offer an alternative.

More Progress than Meets the Eye

The gap between the palpable demand for international cooperation and inadequate supply is one of the great quandaries of our interconnected age. On one hand, all of the world’s key players indeed share interests broadly in blunting the major threats to global peace and prosperity. Deciding on and implementing solutions, though, is another matter.

If the responsibility doctrine achieves its aims, emerging major and middle powers will internalize the duties that come with being a stakeholder. For now, these players are gradually gaining a sense of ownership

Real-world progress for the responsibility doctrine has been modest but significant.

The politics of the responsibility doctrine are admittedly backwards.

over the major challenges the world confronts—a growing belief that the shared problems must be solved. The internal debates about global roles and responsibilities in China, India, and elsewhere are themselves positive indications; Chinese newspapers and academic journals are filled with articles

debating China's proper international role in general as well as in specific cases from Libya to climate.

Real-world progress for the responsibility doctrine has been modest but significant. Just in the last few years, nations came together under U.S. leadership and ensured the world economy did not fall into a global depression, assisted the Libyan people in throwing off their dictator and prevented a major massacre of civilians, battled pirates off the coast of Somalia, decimated the leadership of al-Qaeda, contained a swine flu pandemic, repatriated nearly 900 kilograms of Russian and U.S. highly-enriched uranium from third countries, and isolated Iran like never before.

On some issues, much of the progress has been partial, far short of what is needed. Climate change negotiators are devising new frameworks and commitments to slow global warming, but nowhere near what the science demands. International negotiations to reduce mercury in the atmosphere are ongoing. China has revalued its renminbi 40 percent since 2005, but the larger challenge of rebalancing its economy is going slowly at best.

Some challenges remain unresolved. This is because while pivotal powers can often agree on high-order goals—rid Iran and North Korea of nuclear weapons programs, rebalance the global economy, restart world trade talks, alleviate chronic hunger and poverty—figuring out how to allocate the pain and work to reach these ends is a fractious, laborious, and tedious process. Many of these problems have festered for years or decades, with the international community collectively avoiding responsibility. Breaking these ingrained habits will prove difficult.

Furthermore, the politics of the responsibility doctrine are admittedly backwards—that's part of what makes the challenge so hard even while it is so necessary. Political costs are immediate, while gratification is diffuse and years away. Today's leaders cannot replicate their post-War counterparts' bold order-building strokes at Bretton Woods or Dumbarton Oaks. The diligence and dexterity to grind out steady progress will be the contemporary test of leadership. Thus, in an ever-quickening media environment, the administration needs to counsel patience. It must work to keep expectations in check and continue to remind Americans and global citizens to keep perspective.

Finally, the responsibility doctrine requires that Americans—and especially their elected representatives—discuss, appreciate, and accept a fuller definition of international leadership. If the simple phrase “leading from behind” was milked for political advantage, that’s because it touched a nerve of American politicians’

Americans must discuss, appreciate, and accept a fuller definition of international leadership.

traditional expectation of calling all the shots. While the United States is and will remain the world’s “indispensible power,” it can only prove effective if it encourages others to act alongside it. The United States cannot preserve its influence by preventing other nations from boosting their own stature. Instead, the United States should continue to set the global agenda—above all defining what constitutes genuine success—and push it forward in a variety of ways. In the final analysis, reaching solutions to critical global problems is more important than insisting on the United States being credited at every turn as the unique, sole, and most powerful leader. Secretary of State Clinton expressed this crucial point recently when she said that “part of leading is making sure you get other people on the field.”²⁷

Indeed, the main reason for the responsibility doctrine is that the times demand it. It has become a cliché of global interdependence that contemporary challenges are too formidable even for a superpower to deal with on its own. But, as clichés often are, it happens to be true. Fortunately, the Obama administration has, through a slew of underappreciated tactics, used this doctrine to start fashioning a new style of U.S. global leadership. Hopefully, over time, the country’s body politic will come to appreciate the importance of this endeavor, and political leaders will herald the contributions of other nations as a sign of American success.

Notes

1. Important sources on emerging and established powers jointly fulfilling “responsibility” include: Richard N. Haas, *The Opportunity* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004); Nina Hachigian and Mona Sutphen, *The Next American Century: How the U.S. Can Thrive as Other Powers Rise* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008); G. John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter, “Forging a World of Liberty Under Law: U.S. National Security in the 21st Century,” Final Paper, The Princeton Project on National Security, September 27, 2006, <http://www.princeton.edu/~ppns/report.html>; Bruce Jones, Carlos Pascual, Stephen John Stedman, *Power and Responsibility* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2009); Michael Schiffer and David Shorr, eds., *Powers and Principles* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009); Steven Weber and Bruce Jentleson, *The End of Arrogance*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

2. "Barack Obama's Inaugural Address," *New York Times*, January 20, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/20/us/politics/20text-obama.html?pagewanted=all>.
3. Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, "Remarks by the President at the U.S./China Strategic and Economic Dialogue," July 27, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-uschina-strategic-and-economic-dialogue>.
4. "The National Security Strategy Report," May 2010, http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf.
5. For an eloquent encapsulation of this essential idea, see Anne-Marie Slaughter's remarks in "We're in for a Heck of a Ride," CNN, September 7, 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/09/07/opinion/opinion-roundup-obama/index.html>.
6. U.S. Department of State, Remarks by Geoffrey Pyatt, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, "U.S.–India Strategic Partnership: A Way Forward," Press release, April 27, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rmks/2012/188935.htm>.
7. Samuel Charap, "Reset This," *Foreign Policy*, August 12, 2011, http://www.foreign-policy.com/articles/2011/08/12/reset_this?page=0,2.
8. U.S. Department of State, Remarks by Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State, at the National Convention Center in Hanoi, Vietnam July 23, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/07/145095.htm>.
9. "China Has 'Ample Capacity' to Avoid Hard Landing," *China Daily*, July 19, 2012, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2012-07/19/content_15600176.htm.
10. U.S. Department of State, speech by Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State, "Foreign Policy Address at the Council on Foreign Relations," Washington, DC, July 15, 2009, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/july/126071.htm>.
11. Michael Lewis, "Obama's Way," *Vanity Fair*, October 2012, <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/2012/10/michael-lewis-profile-barack-obama>.
12. "Mitt Romney's Analysis of Barack Obama's Libyan Policy," radio interview transcript, Hugh Hewitt, March 21, 2011, <http://www.hughhewitt.com/transcripts.aspx?id=e3bf5a59-b9c6-4a10-846b-f573a9a9d74d>; Andy Barr, "Sarah Palin 'Profoundly Disappointed' by Obama's Libya Speech," *Politico*, March 28, 2011, <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0311/52106.html>; Charles Krauthammer, "Obama and Libya: The Professor's War," *The Washington Post*, March 24, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/obama_and_libya_the_professors_war/2011/03/24/ABPjvmRB_story.html?wprss=rss_homepage.
13. President Reagan kept a plaque with this favorite quotation on his Oval Office desk. "Reagan the Man," The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Library, <http://www.reaganfoundation.org/reagan-the-man.aspx>.
14. Edward Truman, "The G-20 is Failing," *Foreign Policy*, April 12, 2012, <http://www.piie.com/publications/opeds/oped.cfm?ResearchID=2089>
15. President Obama's remarks on the TPP make it clear China is welcome to join if it adjusts its practices. "Obama Says He Would Welcome Discussions with China on Joining TPP," *China Trade Extra*, November 17, 2012, <http://chinatradeextra.com/20111162382363/China-Trade-Extra-Documents/Text-Documents/obama-says-he-would-welcome-discussions-with-china-on-joining-tpp.html>.
16. U.S. Department of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State, "Remarks at a United Nations Security Council Session on the Situation in Syria," at the UN in New York, January 31, 2012, <http://m.state.gov/md182845.htm>.
17. U.S. Senate, "New START Treaty Floor Speech," Press release, December 15, 2012, <http://lugar.senate.gov/record.cfm?id=329022&>; U.S. Senate, "Isakson Will Vote to

- Ratify New START Treaty,” Press release, December 21, 2010, <http://isakson.senate.gov/press/2010/122110newstart.html>.
18. Closed-door meeting with US officials, July 2012.
 19. James Mann, *The Obamians*, (New York: Viking, 2012), pp. 191–196.
 20. Congressional Research Service, “Iran Sanctions,” by Kenneth Katzman, (Washington, DC, October 15, 2012), pp. 17–18, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS20871.pdf>.
 21. The White House, “President Obama Addresses the UN General Assembly,” video, September 23, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/video/President-Obama-Addresses-the-UN-General-Assembly#transcript>.
 22. U.S. Department of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State, “Remarks at the U.S. Institute of Peace China Conference,” March 7, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2012/03/185402.htm>.
 23. Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, “Remarks by President Obama,” speech in Prague, April 5, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-By-President-Barack-Obama-In-Prague-As-Delivered.
 24. Michele Kelemen, “Clinton Steps Up Calls For A Halt To Violence In Syria,” NPR, February 25, 2012 <http://m.npr.org/story/147384716>.
 25. “International Condemnation of Russia–China veto on Syrian Crisis,” Al Arabiya News, February 5, 2012, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/02/05/192615.html>.
 26. *Ibid.*, for all quotations in this paragraph.
 27. Security Clearance (blog), “A Conversation with Clinton and Panetta,” CNN, August 16, 2011, <http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2011/08/16/a-conversation-with-clinton-and-panetta/>.