

Strategic Collaboration: How the United States Can Thrive as Other Powers Rise

The United States is about to enter its first presidential transition since the September 11 attacks. In January 2009, President-elect John McCain or Barack Obama will face a radically different world than the one that George W. Bush inherited. Beyond the instability in the Middle East, several large, assertive powers—China, India, and Russia—have reemerged on the world stage. Two others, the European Union and Japan, remain strong and are going through their own transitions. This strategic environment is unlike any the United States has ever encountered. This new landscape poses risks but also offers opportunities for the United States if it takes advantage of the moment. The next administration must invest anew at home and harness the power of these new players, particularly through a new forum that can tackle the greatest threats to contemporary global security.

A New Era

Many observers suggest that the rise of other strong powers marks the beginning of a head-to-head geopolitical competition and the end of the American era. In *The Post-American World*, Fareed Zakaria unveils a list of world records that the United States no longer holds, such as the world's tallest skyscraper, biggest mall, largest factory, and others.¹ He describes “the rise of the rest” as the central dynamic of this new era. Parag Khanna writes that “now, rather

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than bestriding the globe, we are competing—and losing—in a geopolitical marketplace alongside the world’s other superpowers: the EU and China.”² Robert Kagan argues that “international competition among great powers has returned” with ideological rivalry as a central feature.³

A national debate about the United States’ outlook and role in a more crowded world is long overdue. Yet, what has been largely missing thus far is a concrete discussion of critical questions: How do the rise of China, India, and

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Russia and the strength of the EU and Japan—the “pivotal powers”—actually affect those matters of greatest importance to Americans? How does their rise affect Americans’ safety and standard of living? We must keep U.S. priorities in mind in this debate or risk becoming obsessed about facets of the new world that are comparatively irrelevant. It is far more important to have partners to prevent terrorists from leveling our skyscrapers than to have the tallest one.

When U.S. interests frame the analysis, the benefits that the rise of these powers delivers for the United States become clear. Although the United States will hold predominant power for a long time to come, that power is no longer sufficient to keep Americans safe and prosperous. Primacy has not been the answer to stabilizing Afghanistan and Iraq, denuclearizing North Korea or Iran, defeating al Qaeda, addressing climate change, or resurrecting global trade. Only with other nations can the United States combat the true threats and best realize new opportunities.

This new world is shaped most fundamentally by technology, not ideology. A truly global financial system now allows money, goods, and many people to cross borders nearly seamlessly. China, India, and Russia have embraced capitalism and this system, as the United States urged for many decades. As a result, their economies are now growing, as is their influence. At the same time, technology has empowered nonstate threats, such as terrorists and pathogens. Moreover, small countries such as North Korea are now able to wield the kind of destructive power that once was reserved only for the strongest states. In this new era, the greatest threats to the peace and prosperity that the pivotal powers want and need does not emanate from other strong powers but from these technologically empowered forces of chaos—the rotten fruit of globalization. Order-seeking nation-states must band together to combat these threats.

The ideology rivalry is a sideshow. Pivotal powers want to get ahead. The almighty dollar—or ruble or euro—is their ideology. Of course, nationalism is strong in every pivotal power. Flashpoints remain treacherous, and national

interests are sure to conflict in many instances. We are not, however, on the cusp of a new Cold War in which adversarial powers are actively seeking to advance their own ideology at the expense of U.S. ideas and ideals.

Furthermore, the pivotal powers can deliver tangible benefits to the United States. Americans care first and foremost about personal safety, and they expect the government to protect them from external threats. Surveying every threat from North Korea to narco-trafficking, only two outside lethal agents have the potential to kill hundreds of thousands of Americans or more here at home and in the near term: terrorists, especially if armed with a radiological device, and a pandemic of contagious disease. Pivotal powers are essential partners to keep Americans safe from these clearest present dangers.

TOGETHER ON TERRORISM

All of the pivotal powers are highly motivated to collaborate on counterterrorism efforts, and U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies have cooperated with their counterparts in each of these countries. Because the United States cannot have an adequate intelligence presence in every country in which terrorists plot, it is highly reliant on the capabilities of others. British vigilance, for example, uncovered and foiled the August 2006 plot to blow up 10 airplanes bound for the United States with liquid bombs.⁴

With the third-largest Muslim population in the world and Pakistan still a key terrorism hub next door, India has monitored and countered radical Islamic groups for decades and has emerged to be an important source of information on a number of extremist groups now targeting the United States. Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), a hard-line radical Sunni Muslim group based in Lahore, has carried out major attacks in India, including on its parliament. It has now turned its attention from Kashmir to training people “to wage war against nonbelievers, and especially the United States.”⁵ In June 2003, 11 American Muslims, called the “paintball terrorists” after a favorite pastime of theirs, were charged in Virginia with training with and fighting for LeT. Six of the men eventually pleaded guilty, and three were convicted at trial. In June 2005, India and the United States signed a 10-year defense pact that promises continued counterterrorism operations.

Stopping the spread of weapons of mass destruction to terrorists is perhaps the most urgent goal of U.S. foreign policy. Unbeknownst to many, Russia is the cofounder and cochair with the United States of the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism. This group of about 50 countries, some of which would have been reluctant to join if not for Russia’s participation, seeks to develop a framework in which they can prevent or respond to potential radio-

logical attacks. Russia's better protection of its own bomb-ready nuclear material is also an urgent priority for U.S. safety.

Over the years, China has become a member in good standing of the non-proliferation community.⁶ Although its record is far from perfect, since the mid-1990s, China has greatly improved its domestic control over the flow of sensitive technologies, signed bilateral agreements with the United States, and joined

international conventions such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the Nuclear Suppliers Group, and others, all of which require adherence to specific guidelines on the transfer of nuclear materials. China was instrumental in felling the most notorious nuclear swap meet of our time, run by Pakistani scientist A. Q. Khan.

Importantly, China has signed up to a major Bush administration antiterrorism program,

the Container Security Initiative (CSI), designed to prevent terrorists from smuggling a nuclear weapon into the United States in shipping containers. Because U.S. ports are vulnerable, the CSI is aimed at finding weapons of mass destruction before they are loaded onto ships. Each year, more than 10 million containers leave China's ports bound for the United States, more than from any other country. U.S. customs officials are now welcomed in the ports of Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Shenzhen.

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PARTNERS ON PATHOGENS

With avian flu on the wane, it is easy to forget that even a terrorist attack with a dirty bomb could not match the destruction of a highly pathogenic virus.⁷ During the last major "Spanish flu" influenza pandemic in 1918, nearly one of every two deaths in the United States was flu related.⁸ Many infectious disease experts believe that another flu pandemic cannot be avoided.⁹

China is a major driver of the problem and of the solution. Influenza originates in wild aquatic birds, which in turn infect domestic birds when they land along their traditional migration routes in Asia. Once the virus is transmitted to poultry, mutations can allow it to infect other animals and people. With the largest poultry industry in the world and a dense population, China is a natural avian flu incubator. Its efforts in preparation, detection, and containment are therefore crucial.

When SARS hit in 2003, China tried to cover up the first cases, but the international opprobrium and devastating financial impact of SARS seem to

have taught at least some Chinese officials a lesson. China cohosted a major avian flu conference in January 2006. It is building a laboratory in Wuhan, one of only a few in the world, with the highest level of safety features required to research highly lethal and rare pathogens. A Chinese doctor, Margaret Chan, is now the head of the World Health Organization (WHO).

All the necessary ingredients for preventing outbreaks of contagious disease—fewer people living with animals, improved sanitation, sophisticated public health surveillance, more labs, new drugs, and demands from a growing middle class for an effective response to an outbreak—will improve as emerging economies grow wealthier. At home, the United States must patch the holes in its own domestic pandemic response system, while in its global struggle against pathogens, Washington should hope for strong, wealthy, and able pivotal powers.

LONG-TERM SECURITY CHALLENGES

Pivotal powers are also necessary partners on a range of less immediate threats, such as global warming and hostile states seeking nuclear weapons. The potential security implications of climate change seem to get worse by the month: disease transmission to new locales, regional disputes fueled by food and water scarcity, chronic energy and resource shortages, and humanitarian disasters with waves of climate refugees. Although China is now the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases, as of 2002 the United States was responsible for nearly 30 percent of the carbon in the atmosphere.¹⁰ Current U.S. inaction on climate change gives China and India a free pass. There is a widespread feeling in emerging economies that the developed world, which grew rich burning carbon with abandon, has to take substantial responsibility for the climate crisis. Its likely devastations can only be mitigated, however, with all of the pivotal powers, as well as everyone else, moving to lower-carbon economic models.

In the effort to roll back North Korea's nuclear program, China's assistance is essential. China has hosted all rounds of the six-party talks and has applied pressure to North Korea at critical junctures. China and the United States do not always see eye to eye on goals or tactics, but progress on North Korea's nuclear program is possible only when Beijing and Washington are working from a shared script.

Because of Iran's energy resources, this country presents a more complex case. Every pivotal power has close ties with Iran. China is Iran's largest energy customer. India and Iran consider each other to be strategic partners and held a joint naval exercise in 2006. Russia has been selling billions of dollars of weapons to Tehran for decades. In 2005, European governments provided \$18 billion in government loan guarantees to Tehran and have been lukewarm

on tougher sanctions until recently. Japan, under pressure from the United States, has used its leverage with Iran behind the scenes and divested itself from an investment in a major Iranian oil field. Each pivotal power seeks to maintain relations with Tehran, yet all acknowledge that a nuclear-armed Iran is dangerous for global stability. On the UN Security Council, China and Russia have resisted the toughest sanctions on Iran but have agreed to others while advocating genuine negotiations. This situation is frustrating to U.S.

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policymakers, but those countries could also use their close ties for leverage over Iran. If Washington engages Tehran, it can call Beijing and Moscow's bluff. If Tehran does not respond to a full and concerted effort to solve the crisis diplomatically, Beijing and Moscow would be hard pressed to refuse additional sanctions. Without pivotal powers on the same page, Iran will continue to be able to play one off of the other and duck international pressure.

Of course, pivotal-power interests will not always align with those of the United States. Disputes will be frequent and sometimes profound. With their increased influence, pivotal powers do and will continue to challenge U.S. dominance and impinge on the freedom of action that the United States has come to enjoy and expect. They will prop up dictators, encourage anti-Americanism, and woo U.S. allies. With China and Russia in particular, conflicts will tend to be magnified by U.S. distrust of opaque, illiberal regimes. Yet, their cooperation, on issues of life or death for the United States, such as terrorism, climate change, and nuclear nonproliferation, is simply more important than many of the more peripheral issues on which we disagree.

THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

After personal safety, Americans care most about their financial well-being. The rising economic clout of the pivotal powers may be disconcerting to some, but it is not a zero-sum game. In fact, the U.S. economy as a whole has benefited substantially by economic engagement with these countries, who are our customers, investors, and suppliers. The fact that the spoils of the globalized economy have not been shared more equitably across the U.S. economy is the United States' problem to fix, not China's or India's. The United States certainly must continue to push on currency corrections and market opening in China, but many of the remedies to the large disruptions felt by U.S. workers will be found in the United States.

In the near term, the United States should pursue a more robust agenda for U.S. competitiveness and innovation focused on a lower-carbon economy, including investments in education, basic research and development, infrastructure, retraining, retirement security, and universal health care. Those steps will ensure new and decent jobs at home and position Americans to continue to excel in the global economy.

Over the longer term, the United States should encourage China and India to create durable and broad middle classes by more quickly enacting a set of their own domestic reforms, such as a nationwide pension system, worker and investor protections, and a functioning health care system. These reforms will create a sustainable basis for economic growth as well as investment and will level out the large imbalances in today's global financial system. This new consumer class, not overextended American households, can then help drive global growth.

Strategic Collaboration

The United States needs a specific, nuanced bilateral strategy toward each pivotal power, but an overarching framework of strategic collaboration is also necessary to manage better and take advantage of today's geopolitical convergence. Strategic collaboration has four elements: compounding American strengths, constructing close relationships with pivotal powers, collaborating with these powers to solve global problems, and covering our bets.

COMPOUNDING AMERICAN STRENGTHS

First and foremost, the United States must put its own house in order. The greatest risks to American prosperity and our way of life start and end at home. As Jon Stewart has said, "The only thing that can destroy us is us." Several familiar problems need sustained and creative attention, including improving the education of our children, especially in math and science so that the United States can continue to be an innovation-rich economy; shoring up U.S. fiscal health to ensure long-term growth and foreign investment; establishing a better health care system so that jobs stay in the country and workers are free to be more entrepreneurial; helping workers cope with job churn; and reducing oil dependency to bring down the U.S. trade deficit and address global warming.

The U.S. military must remain strong, but it has to be redesigned to focus on today's threats and longer-term, indeterminate pivotal-power threats by, for example, investing more in sophisticated leap-frog technologies that will come online only decades from now and less in expensive conventional systems designed for twentieth-century-style conflicts. U.S. assets are so great that if

U.S. leaders make sensible choices, Americans can remain prosperous and safe no matter the trajectories of the pivotal powers. The primary U.S. focus needs to be on changing the country that it has the most power to change.

CONSTRUCTING CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

The second element in strategic collaboration is constructing respectful and stable bilateral relationships with the pivotal powers. The United States should presume that pivotal powers are “with us” because they usually are. Only when its vital or highly important interests are at stake should Washington put the constructive nature of pivotal-power relationships on the line. In practice, this concept will mean thinking creatively and flexibly about how to deal with the chronic irritants in major-power relations, such as Taiwan and NATO enlargement.

COLLABORATING WITH PIVOTAL POWERS

With a foundation of productive relationships with pivotal powers, the United States can call on them to use their strength, ideas, and political clout to solve serious global problems. The United States can realize the promise of this rare historical alignment by embedding pivotal powers deeply in the world order and collaborating with them to strengthen it. In return for having a larger stake in the world order, pivotal powers must be willing to assume greater responsibility for building that order. That will be a central challenge.

Global institutions, rules, and networks have a strong track record of furthering U.S. interests. The United States and the world need them to help organize the collective effort to battle threats that do not respect boundaries. These institutions reflect and reinforce the liberal qualities of rule of law, transparency, accountability, and respect for individual rights that Americans cherish. The world order that the United States launched in 1945 has delivered many benefits, but all of its major initiatives are embattled.

Only with pivotal-power buy-in can the world remake the NPT and strengthen the International Atomic Energy Agency, without which the world could have had 30 nuclear powers today instead of nine. Their participation is needed to empower the WHO to monitor disease outbreaks better and coordinate a response. Only together could we create a new mechanism, such as Council on Foreign Relations president Richard Haass has suggested, to encourage cross-border investment flows by establishing common rules about transparency, conditions under which national security interests can prevent foreign investment, and dispute resolution.¹¹ What is missing altogether from today’s international architecture is a forum in which pivotal powers can come together to discuss how all this work will get done, as discussed further below.

COVERING OUR BETS

The final prong of strategic collaboration recognizes that, despite the best U.S. efforts, the future could witness an aggressive pivotal power bent on thwarting vital U.S. goals. The United States must therefore continue to deter other power centers from disrupting the world order, deny them the ability to harm major U.S. interests, and ensure that the United States is prepared to defend its interests if deterrence fails.

This task calls for covering our bets, but the path of hedging is a treacherous one. “Selective hedging” will allow the United States to retain its diplomatic and military leverage in ways that are not broadly targeted at any one power. The United States should hedge against certain futures, such as China attacking Taiwan, not against certain powers per se. Selective hedging includes three elements: better intelligence about pivotal powers; a hub-and-spoke model for U.S. relationships with the pivotal powers, in which Washington tries to maintain deeper ties with each power than those that they have with one another; and a highly capable, forward-deployed military.

No strategy toward big powers can guarantee success in such a complex and fluid international arena, and this approach will not guarantee an end to pivotal-power strife. Yet, strategic collaboration stands the best chance of securing a world that supports U.S. interests. It focuses U.S. attention on investing at home to give future Americans the best chance for secure and prosperous lives. It deters and prepares for pivotal-power aggression while not encouraging it. It honors pivotal powers’ need for recognition by giving them a voice in the future of the world, yet demands responsibility in return. It increases the United States’ knowledge about the other powers in case of a future conflict and minimizes chances of misperception. It strengthens the world order that benefits Americans.

Strategic collaboration stands the best chance of securing a world that supports U.S. interests.

Is It Politically Feasible in the United States?

Strategic collaboration has costs, as any strategy does; and these costs may be politically difficult, particularly in the short term. The outcome will be, in the words of Haass, “a little less sovereignty” and a little less control in exchange for a more stable, coherent world.¹² The United States will have to agree to be bound by the same solutions, policies, institutions, and rules as everyone else.

Strategic collaboration requires more intense and deft U.S. diplomacy. In some cases, this additional diplomacy will mean the United States cannot act as quickly as it might like. In rare cases, when time is of the essence, the United States will have to weigh the heavy costs associated with acting alone against the harm triggered by this delay.

Particularly in times of economic stress, it is tempting for politicians to point to foreign scapegoats, complicating the political feasibility of effective

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collaboration. The late 1980s saw a frenzy over the “buying of America” by Japan—a small country, a treaty ally, and a democracy. These days, sovereign wealth funds and diversifying Chinese state-owned enterprises are receiving heightened attention and scrutiny. Even if the president is keen on pursuing strategic collaboration, some congressional leaders and pundits may well make that difficult.

Yet, decade after decade, public opinion surveys show Americans want the United States to work with others even when it means they do not always get their way. That begs the larger question of why this preference is not reflected in U.S. policy. First, U.S. policymakers and their staff appear unaware of U.S. attitudes. A 2004 poll indicated that although 66 percent of the public surveyed said that the United States should address more issues through the United Nations, even if that means that the United States will not get its way, only 9 percent of congressional staffers guessed correctly that a large majority of Americans would feel that way.¹³ Second, the prevailing view in Congress is that constituents will not adjust their voting patterns over such issues, allowing the vocal minority to rule the day.

The instinctive political reaction, instead of collaboration, may be to try to use U.S. leverage to hold some rising pivotal powers at bay. Yet, this approach would inevitably fail and invite pivotal powers to proceed without us. The meetings of the newly formed East Asia Summit in 2005 and 2006, spurred on by China, included India, Japan, and every country in Asia but not the United States, the reigning Pacific power—a development unthinkable a few years earlier. Similarly, despite heavy-handed U.S. efforts to undermine the International Criminal Court, European leadership brought the court to life anyway. China and Russia, along with the Central Asian republics but not the United States, discuss security matters and even conduct large-scale military exercises through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Although these efforts do not have major strategic ramifications now, over time, alternate structures may reduce U.S. influence and give pivotal powers platforms to deny U.S. in-

terests. The United States should want big powers to play on its team instead of forming a league of their own.

Selling strategic collaboration at home will be difficult, but not impossible. It must start at the top with a president who is willing to make the case for international cooperation and international institutions directly to the American populace, creating the national mood and grassroots support necessary to sway certain recalcitrant lawmakers. The president must make the benefits of collaboration with the pivotal powers tangible to Americans with specific examples, and the White House will need a communications strategy that takes more advantage of new technologies to do so. Still, these messages will resonate more easily with the public when Washington is taking steps at home to empower Americans to compete in today's global economy.

To gather the support of Congress, nothing can substitute for regular, respectful consultation. Regarding difficult choices that require its consent, two approaches have worked in the past. One is to start incrementally. In the case of the thorny issue of global trade, the regime started with the more narrowly defined General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and, as it proved its effectiveness, evolved into the more powerful World Trade Organization. At the opposite end of the spectrum is the blizzard approach that the Clinton administration used to secure permanent normal trading relations (PNTR) status for China. Fact sheets, press releases, and presidential statements blanketed Washington for several weeks in the spring of 2000; you could not throw a rock on Capitol Hill without hitting an administration official testifying or meeting with constituent groups about the benefits of PNTR.

With a new generation of American thinkers and leaders, these battles ought to become easier. It becomes more apparent with each day how intertwined the United States' fate is with those of other powers. Furthermore, the Facebook generation thinks nothing of "friending" people in other countries.

The United States remains by far the strongest power in the international system. With great tools of persuasion at its disposal, Washington has disproportionate impact on the solutions or institutions that will result. As a new administration reengages with institutions that it has belittled of late, it will be taking a key step toward preserving its own still-huge leverage within them, in the face of growing pivotal-power influence. Because institutions and principles have inertia behind them, they could reflect U.S. priorities and values even beyond the time when overwhelming American dominance alone could sustain them.

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Turning Ideas into Institutions

A venue for the world's six biggest powers to discuss issues of mutual concern is needed.

Even if the next president is swayed by the merits of strategic collaboration, what is required to turn these ideas into reality? The United States has to do nothing less than regain the trust of the world community. One senior UN diplomat believes that Washington has lost “the benefit of the doubt.”¹⁴ One of the dangers for incoming policymakers is assuming that U.S. popularity will rebound easily in the wake of the Bush administration. Although it has gotten much worse lately, resentments over unilateralism started long before 2000. Regaining that trust will require the United States to prove that it wants again to contribute to the common good. With limited time and resources, the new president will quickly need to plant diplomatic seeds that can grow into a new collaborative approach toward the pivotal powers and the world.

Because so many of the globe's pressing problems require the active cooperation of the world's six biggest powers—China, the EU, India, Japan, Russia, and the United States—there needs to be a venue in which they can together discuss issues of mutual concern. Remarkably, not a single international organization offers them such a forum today. The UN Security Council excludes Japan and India, the Group of Eight (G-8) excludes India and China, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development as well as NATO exclude China, India, and Russia.

Expansion of the UN Security Council to include Germany, India, and Japan is most sensible because the international community empowered this forum to consider issues of international peace and security. Decisions are legally binding, and UN members must contribute financially to UN activities around the world. Despite multiple efforts, however, Security Council reform appears to be a bridge too far in the short term, and there is no time to waste. While reformers continue to push that boulder up the hill, the six powers must find another venue.

An ideal world architecture would be comprised of the Core Six—the C-6—an informal caucus of the pivotal powers with each having one seat. Such a small group would maximize efficiency in decisionmaking and make shifting blame more difficult. With the United States, these six powers represent two-thirds of global gross domestic product and one-half of the world's population. If the C-6 could chart a course together to tackle critical problems, it would move the ball forward in a meaningful way.

Yet, there are several impediments to forming such a new group today. First, limiting the EU to one seat may be too difficult at this juncture. It is not in the interest of China, India, Japan, or Russia to pick a fight with the EU. Second, and more fundamentally, the pivotal-power capitals have no appetite for supporting a new entity conceived in Washington, no matter the merits or how strongly the United States assures them that it does not intend to run the show. Establishing the C-6 is thus not a simple or straightforward matter.

Because the main goal is to get the pivotal powers around a single table—any table—for now, the more practical, albeit less captivating approach is to work through the G-8, with an eye toward revisiting the C-6 again in the future. In 2005, Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom initiated the “G-8+5” group, adding the leading emerging economies Brazil, China, India, Mexico, and South Africa. This group subsequently met to address climate change in 2006, and in 2007 Prime Minister Angela Merkel of Germany proposed making the dialogue permanent. This process could be pushed even further to make the “G-13” the main consultative forum of the G-8. A larger group is not ideal; the advantages of being able to move forward immediately with the key players outweigh such concerns.¹⁵

To make the forum more useful overall, especially in a larger configuration, the heads of state meeting needs to become more streamlined and less formal. The agenda should be cut to one or two issues, the length of speeches trimmed considerably, and the final communiqué eliminated altogether. This would move the G-13 back to fulfilling its original and necessary purpose as an informal opportunity for leaders to spend time together and to debate the issues. Over the years, the preparation and staging of the heads of state meeting, as well as the negotiations over the communiqué language, have become too onerous.

The real work of the G-13 would get done in meetings at the ministerial level. Foreign ministers or national security adviser–equivalents, depending on the issue, should meet at least three times a year. With a scaled-back meeting of heads of state, these meetings will no longer be largely preparatory but could include substantive discussion and coordination.

For at least one of these gatherings, it makes sense to include a top political adviser of the head of state, in the U.S. case, the White House chief of staff. In an era in which the lines between the highest-priority domestic and international issues such as climate change, terrorism, global pandemics, capital markets, and immigration continue to blur, the inclusion of officials whose primary responsibility is domestic affairs is an essential adjustment.

These ministerial meetings should be closed-door, off-the-record gatherings with no media allowed, no public agenda, and no formal statements. (Of course, heads of state and ministers should inform their citizens of the discussions as they would do ordinarily.) Depending on the issue, other key countries

could be invited to attend given meetings. The G-13 should also take advantage of new communications technologies, such as video conferencing and on-line collaboration tools, to increase contact between the in-person meetings.

In exchange for the prestige and influence of being included, every power would be expected to shoulder the burden in tangible ways in response to global challenges. G-13 participants would be held to account by their peers and the rest of the world for their actions. Getting the reemerging powers of China, India, and Russia to participate and contribute financially, given their domestic priorities and needs, will be an ongoing and key challenge of this approach.

A New Start for the New Era

On January 21, 2009, the 44th U.S. president will be welcoming visitors to the West Wing as part of the traditional “open house,” the last of the public ceremonies associated with the inaugural. Like the rest of the world, the American public will be watching the new president and waiting for an answer to the question uppermost on everyone’s mind: now what?

The rise of the pivotal powers cannot be stopped, nor should it.

The first few months of 2009 provide a tiny opening for clear, symbolic gestures. The United States must convey an unmistakable signal that it has corrected its course and is now ready to rejoin the world and solve common problems in a collabor-

orative way. Fortunately, the opportunities for making such statements are numerous and feasible. Closing the Guantanamo Bay detention facility, publicly promising to participate meaningfully in a UN-led process to find a solution to the climate crisis, and easing the embargo on Cuba all would signal fundamental departures from a Cold War–era approach to foreign policy and demonstrate the U.S. willingness to work with other countries and through multilateral institutions to solve pressing global challenges, while understanding the self-sacrifice that goal can involve.

The president should also use this window, during which the American people will be listening more closely than usual, to draw the close connections between U.S. choices at home and its standing abroad. He should encourage investments in education and health care that will allow America to thrive even while others are gaining ground. Finally, calling for a new G-13 forum would be a bold and useful step that the next president could take both to convince the world that the United States wants to join it again and to further the collaboration with pivotal powers that will ensure American well-being into the future.

The rise of the pivotal powers cannot be stopped, nor should it. Their rise brings numerous benefits to Americans. In many ways, they hold our fate in their hands, and we hold theirs; they cannot conquer us, and we cannot conquer them. The United States should build relationships that maximize cooperation and stability, which benefit all. Now, while no irreconcilable differences plague its relationships with pivotal powers, the United States can forge a new, positive, and proactive concert among them. There is only one right way to approach pivotal powers in the twenty-first century—to draw them near.

Notes

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