

THE
NEXT GENERATION
NEXT PROJECT



OBAMA
ONE YEAR LATER

*DECEMBER 16, 2009
MERIDIAN INTERNATIONAL CENTER
WASHINGTON, DC*



Preface

On December 16, 2009, forty Next Generation Fellows from across the nation including government officials, representatives from business, the hi-tech sector, international institutions, the military, nonprofit organizations, and academia gathered at the Meridian International Center in Washington, D.C. The Assembly was co-sponsored by The American Assembly, The Robert S. Strauss Center for International Security and Law at the University of Texas, the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), and the Meridian International Center (MIC), and it was the first meeting in the second phase of The Next Generation Project. The fellows, representing a range of views, backgrounds, and interests were divided into two equal groups for two structured discussion sessions. A set of background readings was compiled and circulated beforehand to provide common ground for the diverse group.

The Next Generation Project is directed by Francis J. Gavin, Director of the Strauss Center for International Security and Law, who welcomed the fellows in the first plenary session. Admiral B. R. Inman, Lyndon B. Johnson Centennial Chair in National Policy, The University of Texas at Austin and trustee of The American Assembly, introduced the keynote speaker and observed the meeting.

The Assembly opened with a panel, moderated by John Nagl, president of CNAS. Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins, Coordinator for Threat Reduction Programs, Department of State; Janine Davidson, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Plans; and Erik Leklem, Senior Strategy Advisor, Department of State served as panelists. Kathleen Hicks, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Forces, addressed the fellows at a luncheon plenary session.

The American Assembly gratefully acknowledges the generous support of The Ford Foundation.

The Assembly and the other cosponsors take no position on any of the subjects presented here for the public. In addition, it should be noted that fellows took part in this meeting as individuals and spoke for themselves.

The cosponsors would like to acknowledge and express gratitude to Laura Eise and Leslie Holmes who observed the Assembly and drafted this document and to the discussion leaders: Stacey Abrams, Patrick Gorman, Nike Irvin, and Parag Khanna, who guided the fellows in their sessions.

Disclaimer

The Next Generation Project Fellows at the Assembly titled “Obama – One Year Later” cosponsored by The American Assembly, The Robert S. Strauss Center, the Center for a New American Security, and the Meridian International Center on December 16, 2009 in Washington, D.C. did not review a draft of this report at the conclusion of the meeting, or prior to its posting. This report is the cosponsors representation of what was said at the meeting. No

attempt was made to reach conclusions or achieve consensus at the Assembly.

It should be noted that the Next Generation Project Fellows took part in this meeting as individuals and spoke for themselves rather than for the organizations and institutions with which they are affiliated.

Introduction

With the election and inauguration of Barack Obama, the United States ushered in a historic administration as well as a new and higher set of expectations. President Obama campaigned on the platform of a promise of a fresh approach to both domestic and foreign policy, inspiring hope around the world. Now into its second year in office, it is time to assess how the Obama Administration has begun to realize these great aspirations and the daunting challenges they face.

In the first session of the Assembly, *Promises and Performance*, the fellows discussed the Obama Administration's delivery on campaign promises and the difficulty of pragmatic implementation in the U.S. political system. In the second session, *The Way Forward*, the fellows evaluated the success of the Obama Administration at heeding recommendations made at previous Next Generation conferences and set forth new guidelines for the following years.

Promises and Performance

The 21st century is a transformed world, and modern foreign policy is facing very different challenges than those of the Cold War. The United States is one actor among an increasingly diverse arena, ranging from nation-states to corporations and various nonprofit organizations. An ambitious domestic agenda faces a global and domestic economy burdened by a long recession and uncertain prospects for recovery. Legacy institutions on both a national and international level, created to deal with 20th century problems, further compound these issues.

In consideration of these critical matters, the Assembly evaluated President Obama's campaign promises and delivery during his first year in office. In general, the Assembly agreed that the Obama Administration handled its inheritance well. Prior administrations have been caught by surprise, yet this administration has not been overwhelmed by any particular issue. However, transition is time-consuming and cumbersome. The question of how the Obama Administration delivered on its campaign promises becomes whether it can convert them into real policy.

Campaign Promises and Delivery

Making Progress

The Assembly was cautiously optimistic of the overall trajectory of President Obama's agenda and identified a number of foreign policy goals that have shown progress. Regarding the war in Afghanistan, President Obama promised to send additional troops and increase financial support. In early December, the administration announced an accelerated deployment of 30,000 troops. The Obama Administration also improved the global perception of the United States and its commitment to international cooperation through diplomatic outreach and consistent political rhetoric. Examples include increased dialogue with Cuba and Venezuela as well as President Obama's marked effort to reach out to the Middle East in his Cairo speech.

Stagnating Policies

A political inheritance and undefined strategic goals hinder President Obama's agenda. There is little prioritization in his foreign policy, and relations with Latin America, China, and Iran lack direction. Innovation and change—specifically regarding health care—have run into barriers in Congress. Immigration and education appear to be under the radar, and reaching across the aisle to create bipartisan policies is proving problematic. President Obama's campaign pledge to end the ban on homosexuals serving openly in the military has seen no progress, and the deadline to close the U.S. military detention center in Guantanamo Bay has passed without delivery.

Pragmatic Implementation

Realities of the Political System

To return on its campaign promises, the Obama Administration must balance U.S. long-term interests, the value of voters, and a new foreign policy paradigm. However, even the most dedicated and politically savvy president can only effect so much change at once. Structural and procedural difficulties, from the lengthy process of political nominations to interdepartmental inefficiencies, slow and impede progress. As one Next Generation Project Fellow said, it is difficult for new administrations to "charge out of the gates." Bureaucracy frequently creates inertia and partisanship slows the political process further. Another fellow stated: "inefficiency is the tax we pay to avoid tyranny." The question is, how long can we afford it? Checks and balances are the backbone of our government yet the process has stagnated. There are limits to President Obama's political capital and without choosing wisely, he will be unable to bypass political snares. A dearth of bureaucratic mid-level management further restricts progress and adds to policy stagnation.

Proactive Rhetoric vs. Reactive Policies

U.S. policy is always confronted by the divide between rhetoric and reality, yet there is specific concern that President Obama's rhetorical flourish is defining foreign policy without the guidance of a clear strategy. Successfully articulating a vision is a precondition to implement changes, but it is not enough by itself. Finding the proper balance between idealistic and inspiring rhetoric and the need for pragmatism is difficult but necessary. Too far in either direction sets the stage for disaster. President Obama has established high expectations, yet inherited crises, from the economy to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, have forced the administration to temper these with reactive movement.

To turn proactive rhetoric into policy, the Obama Administration must work to create linkages and look past dependency politics on both sides of U.S. relations. For example, if we were less dependent on oil, it would change our foreign policy. The administration must continue to reach out across barriers to international engagement. This can occur at the citizen level. Allowing U.S. citizens to enter Cuba, for example, would have a positive effect on both sides of U.S. - Cuba relations. The Obama Administration is using more traditional 20th century military tactics than expected, and this reliance on hard power should be reexamined in an increasingly interconnected world.

The Way Forward

Over the course of the past two and a half years The Next Generation Project outlined foreign policy recommendations for the incoming administration. A new paradigm is needed that recognizes the unique challenges and new actors of foreign policy in the 21st century. To what extent did the Obama Administration embrace these views? The Assembly agreed that the two recommendations President Obama successfully acted upon were changing the tone with which the United States engages with the world and leading the development and ratification of international treaties. While there are many Next Generation Project recommendations that President Obama has yet to address, the fellows prioritized an economic policy that focuses on global competitiveness through the free flow of ideas, information, and money. The Assembly then focused on what recommendations it would give the Obama Administration based on its previous performance and the challenges that lie ahead.

Recommendations Aligned with the Administration

Global Engagement

There was widespread consensus among the fellows that President Obama is actively signaling the United States' interest in listening to and engaging with the world. President Obama set a White House record for visiting over twenty countries during his first year in office delivering key speeches in Cairo, Prague, and Moscow. The tone and style of his administration is markedly different than that of our previous administration. He reached out an open hand to the Muslim world signaling his interest in a new partnership based on mutual respect and interest. He is renewing U.S. efforts to engage with North Koreans to bring them back to the Six-Party talks, an effort that requires cooperation from regional partners such as China and South Korea. It is clear that President Obama is slowly but surely beginning to shift preconceptions regarding how open the United States is to listening to and working with voices around the world. The fellows agreed that this is an important first step that creates trust and sets the stage for implementing change. President Obama has captured the world's attention, and the fellows believe now is the time to act.

International Treaties

As President Obama engages the world, he is also demonstrating the U.S. commitment to reaffirming previous international treaties and forging new ones – another recommendation issued by the Next

Generation Project Fellows during previous Assemblies. Examples of the President's commitment to international treaties include his announcement with President Medvedev that the United States and Russia will work diligently toward a new arms control treaty, his recently negotiated meaningful yet modest non-binding climate accord in Copenhagen, and his vow to immediately and aggressively pursue the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. The fellows realize that ratifying these treaties will likely be an uphill battle. However, these treaties signify to the world that the United States is willing to take action on critical international challenges.

Recommendations for the Administration

Global Competitiveness

The Obama administration's economic policy seems to still be in crisis management mode, rescuing the United States from economic meltdown. While President Obama is making progress, there does not seem to be a long-term strategy regarding the United States' global competitiveness strategy. The foundation of American power in the 21st century will be based on our ability to generate wealth. In order to create a vibrant economy, there must be a free flow of people, information, and money that harnesses pioneering ideas.

The United States must act now to competitively educate its populace, encourage entrepreneurship, and attract the top talent from around the world to ensure its global competitiveness in the future. Some fellows warned that this may mean that the United States must scale back its international commitments and acknowledge that to a certain degree there is a tradeoff between investment in the future and current security challenges, particularly in the Middle East. However if the United States does not actively set the stage for future global competitiveness, it will not have the resources to implement and sustain solid foreign and domestic policies.

Recommendations Specific to the Obama Administration

Reform the U.S. Political System

The world is converging, but the U.S. government is at a standstill. The Obama Administration has set forth some innovative policy ideas but has difficulty implementing them because of archaic institutions, entrenched bureaucracy, and partisan politics. In some ways, the administration is making the situation worse. For example, the Obama Administration made its confirmation screening process more rigorous to a degree that it is denying certain people appointments.

The U.S. government must be reformed to convene, communicate, and coordinate both within and among local, state, and federal government. Training, coordination, and delegation are critical to increase government efficiency. In addition, the government must engage new actors such as the private sector and non-government organizations. Collective action is imperative, whether engaging the private sector in counter-radicalization or devising strategically beneficial relationships for resource driven partnerships. For example, U.S. energy solutions for the Chinese government provide the opportunity for a mutually-beneficial partnership for climate change.

The U.S. government must also effectively use technology, and to do so it must leverage the private sector. The government cannot run concurrent single-track foreign policy. It must utilize technology to move flexibly on multiple foreign policy tracks and modes. The government should harness technology to communicate its vision to the different levels and sectors of government, streamlining policy creation and implementation. In addition, the administration should use technology to better communicate with constituents, because ultimately, all politics are local.

Grand Strategy

While discussing the progress, or lack thereof, of President Obama's first year in office, many fellows agreed that the Obama Administration lacks a grand strategy with which to govern its foreign policy. The administration is reactive on issues as they come to the forefront instead of being proactive looking long-term and preventing issues before they occur. Granted, the administration was saddled with two wars and an economy in crisis before President Obama took office. But in order to solve these issues and the many others that President Obama has pledged to address, there must be a unity of purpose and a willingness to engage foreign policy challenges and opportunities.

The Next Generation Fellows believe that there are the beginnings of a grand strategy within the Obama Administration, but from the vantage point of the American people and countries around the world, it is hard to tell. One fellow warned that when countries are unsure of U.S. policies, they begin to hedge against the United States – as long as there is a lack of clarity regarding what direction the United States is headed. The Obama Administration must engage a spectrum of views and interests beyond the usual suspects, including such initiatives as the Next Generation Project, and establish a set of organizing principles for foreign policy. Out of these principles, a grand strategy must emerge. If a grand strategy is not created and publicized, confidence will be lost both at home and abroad.

Prioritization

Developing a grand strategy is paramount. Within that grand strategy the administration's foreign policy current prioritizations are: ending the war in Iraq, sending a surge of troops to Afghanistan, and stopping the global financial crisis. But beyond those, Americans and the world must glean from President Obama's speeches what his other top foreign policy priorities are. One fellow characterized President Obama as being "starry-eyed"-- seeing all global issues as issues where the United States must be engaged, and if not in a leadership position, then at least attempting to solve them. This is a lofty goal considering the financial constraints the United States is facing and the myriad of global issues that require action.

When prioritizing issues, options must be weighed, trade-offs understood, and tough decisions made. Inevitably some issues will drop in importance, and this may prove to be unpopular. The Next Generation Project Fellows recommend that when making these tough decisions, they should be based on priorities that are set according to the guiding principles of a grand strategy.

Conclusion

The convening power of the United States is enormous, and we have the potential to be the “architect of cooperation around the world,” as a fellow commented. In the day to day world of the government it is difficult to take a long-term view, yet the need for innovative policies and a grand strategy is clear. As one participant stated, this is the need for initiatives such as The Next Generation Project—the sessions provide an arena for the dialogue and diversity necessary to develop new and strategic foreign policy approaches. As the world becomes more interconnected, forums such as this allow idea and information sharing as well as networking opportunities.

The purpose of this Assembly was to assess the Obama Administration one year later – have the promises of the campaign materialized into sound foreign policy and to what extent has President Obama implemented the recommendations of previous Next Generation Project Assemblies? It may be too soon to tell; indeed diplomacy and foreign policy are not about instant gratification. However, based on President Obama’s track record thus far, the fellows recommend that President Obama should craft a globally competitive economic policy that focuses on innovation and the creation of wealth for future generations. He should begin to restructure the U.S. government both within and among sectors to implement policy more efficiently and effectively. Finally, the Obama Administration must have an overarching grand strategy to foreign policy that will assist the administration in prioritizing issues, which will enhance the effectiveness of President Obama’s tenure in office.

December 16, 2009



**The Next Generation Project
Obama – One Year Later**

**Meridian International Center
Washington, DC
December 16, 2009**

Stacey Y. Abrams

Representative
Georgia General Assembly

Anika Binnendijk

Special Assistant
International Security Affairs, OSD Policy
U.S. Department of State

Sharon Burke

Vice President
Center for a New American Security

Joshua W. Busby

Assistant Professor
Crook Distinguished Scholar
Robert S. Strauss Center for International
Security and Law
LBJ School of Public Affairs
The University of Texas at Austin

Eva Busza

Principal Officer, Strategic Planning Unit
Executive Office of the Secretary-General
United Nations

F. Christopher Calabia

Vice President
Bank Supervision Group
Federal Reserve Bank of New York

Samuel Charap

Associate Director for Russia and Eurasia
National Security and International Policy
Program
Center for American Progress

Janine Davidson

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
Office of the Secretary of Defense, Policy

Marissa Doran

Majority Professional Staff
U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs

Gregory W. Engle

Associate Director
Robert S. Strauss Center for International
Security and Law
The University of Texas at Austin

Andrew P. N. Erdmann

Consultant
McKinsey & Company

Andersen Fisher

Founder & Managing Member
Talamod Asset Management, LLC

Daniella M. Foster

Director of Public-Private Partnerships
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
U.S. Department of State

Francis J. Gavin

Director
Robert S. Strauss Center for International
Security and Law
Tom Slick Professor in International Affairs
LBJ School of Public Affairs
The University of Texas at Austin

Andrew Gettelman

Scientist
National Center for Atmospheric Research

Patrick Gorman

Principal
Booz Allen Hamilton

Bailey S. Hand

Deputy Director for Afghanistan
Office of the Secretary of Defense

Jay Hanson

Vice President, Global Product Management
eBay Inc.

Christian R. Hennemeyer

Vice President
External Relations
Bridging the Divide

Kathleen Hicks

Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Strategy,
Plans, Forces
U. S. of Department of Defense

Kelly Howard

Special Assistant to the Army Chief of Staff
U.S. Army

William Inboden

Senior Vice President
Legatum Institute

Adm. B.R. Inman (Ret.)

Interim Dean & LBJ Centennial Chair in
National Policy
LBJ School of Public Affairs
The University of Texas at Austin

Nike Irvin

Principal
Consulting by Nike Irvin

AMB Bonnie D. Jenkins

Coordinator for Threat Reduction Programs
U.S. Department of State

Parag Khanna

Senior Research Fellow
Director
Global Governance Initiative
New America Foundation

Daniel Kurtz-Phelan

Policy Planning
U.S. State Department

Erik J. Leklem

Senior Strategy Advisor
U.S. Department of State

Doug McArthur

Vice Chairman
Board of Trustees
The Presbyterian Foundation

John A. Nagl

President
Center for a New American Security

John S. Park

Senior Research Associate & Director
Northeast Asia

Marisa Paul

Strategy Analyst
Northrop Grumman

Ely Ratner

Associate Political Scientist
RAND Corporation

Kaleb Redden

Director for Building Global Partnerships
Office of the Secretary of Defense

Barton D. Ruth

Farm Owner/Operator

John M. Sirek

Citizenship Program Director
McCormick Foundation

Amy M. Wilkinson

Senior Fellow
Center for Business and Government
Harvard University

Thomas Wright

Executive Director of Studies
Chicago Council on Global Affairs

Eric Young

Manager
Strategic Development
The Boeing Company

Observers

Cailin Birch

Manager of Public Programs and Board Liaison
Meridian International Center

Robert Coonrod

Chief Operating Officer
Meridian International Center

Laura Eise

Stuart Holliday

President and CEO
Meridian International Center

Leslie Holmes

Consultant
Accenture