Obama’s Foreign Policy: Has He Earned a Second Term?

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Evaluating Obama’s Foreign Policy

• In limited ways, success (world of woe receding):
  – Ending 2 Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan
  – Killing OBL
  – Restoring America’s Status
  – Avoiding a Depression

• In broader sense, failure (war clouds gathering):
  – In ME, alienated Israel, while Iran and Islamists gain
  – In Europe, weakened missile defense while Russia expands influence in Georgia, Ukraine and elsewhere
  – In Asia, touted cooperation, while China becomes more belligerent
Jigsaw Puzzle vs. Chess Match

• Succeeded by framing challenges as DISCRETE PROBLEMS to be solved by cooperation – a jigsaw puzzle model of world affairs
• Failed by neglecting larger STRATEGIC STRUGGLE between free and authoritarian societies and groups – a chess match or chessboard view of world affairs
• Successful presidents mix and match views to meet time and circumstances – Truman and Reagan won the Cold War
• Obama sees world too much as jigsaw puzzle and too little as chess match.
Jigsaw Puzzle Model

• Problems are Material not Moral – proliferation, multilateral institutions, resource use, and global poverty, not democracy and human rights
• Problems are Interrelated – No Priorities, Not Convinced of new “Asian Pivot”
• Interests are Shared not Competitive – “Leading from Behind,” Libyan Experience
• Use of Force is Last or Past Resort – War Necessary only AFTER (Afghanistan) not Before Attack (Iraq) and to stop genocide (Libya)
Chessboard Model

• Countries see Common Problems through Different Cultures and Political Ideologies – Bush: Freedom (consent) vs. Tyranny (coercion)

• Interests are Sovereign not Shared – China, Russia and Muslim extremists seek more Authoritarian not Freer World

• Multilateralism Leads to Inaction or Morally Objectionable Outcomes – Israel Proliferator, not Iran and North Korea

• Force Changes Circumstances that Define Problems – Russia advances in Near Abroad, Iran expands in ME, China amasses military power (and gains from North Korea?)
Getting Mix Right

• Bush was right to see terrorism as moral issue requiring use of force (chess match) but wrong to neglect diplomatic follow-up (jigsaw puzzle)

• Obama overplays diplomacy (jigsaw puzzle) and leaves US undefended, “a paper tiger” (chess match)

• Polk and Reagan got mix right

• Romney has more of a chess match view of the world