

Richard Haass Presentation Summary

Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations spoke in Jacksonville for the World Affairs Council at UNF 1/11/10. His most recent book is *War of Necessity, War of Choice*.

Haass declined to assign any grade to the Obama Administration in foreign policy at this date. It was too early to judge with three more years to go and perhaps a second term. Additionally 2009 saw no major foreign policy crisis by which to assess this presidency. However he did characterize the Obama foreign policy as emphasizing negotiations, diplomacy and multilateralism. The bias is toward the foreign policy 'realists' for whom the principal purpose of U.S. efforts should be to influence what other people do outside their borders and not what they do internally (in how they govern). This administration has learned, however, that reasonableness doesn't always yield results and doesn't always lead to needed multilateral action. Multilateralism is preferable, but not always possible. Iran is one example where you 'can't just stand aside.'

2010 is a year in which "foreign policy begins at home". Effective leadership, both here and abroad requires it. The U.S. economy is pivotal and its recovery will absorb the lion's share of the administration's attention. Openness economically leads to openness politically. Health care is also major and it unfortunately has led to a very divisive political situation. There are three important domestic issues (with direct impact on U.S. foreign policy) which are ensnared in this divisiveness. One is how to reduce the deficit. There is no consensus. The second is trade and jobs. Multilateral trade agreements are languishing in Congress. The third is immigration.

Looking at other issues he commented that on terrorism we need to play offense and not just defense. He opposed the 30,000 plus-up in U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan. Terrorists will just set up shop elsewhere—as in Yemen. That will lead to a U.S. drawdown without prejudicing the future of Afghanistan. Iraq he said cannot be taken for granted. Latin America is not doing too badly. Europe's weak point is its dependence on Russian oil and gas.

The greater Middle East to include Pakistan and India is the area of greatest concern. It is not about Israel and the Palestinians. There are no indicators that advancing those negotiations would even be possible now. Israel sees it in its interests to do what it can to shore up the West Bank economy and leadership recognizing that Gaza is in Hamas hands because of the devastation and desperation created there. Israel's major threat is from Iran and its acquisition of nuclear weapons. It is the most compelling national security issue for the U.S. as well. Haass pointed out the drawbacks to any preemptive strike on Iranian nuclear sites. At best their weaponization might be set back in the short term, but we don't know how effective bombing would be against the sites we do know about, much less the sites we don't know about. A military strike force has tremendous costs and risks. How many casualties might there be? What would it do to the growing anti-regime, "green movement" which has taken to the streets? Haass said that he has written an article just recently urging the U.S. to be more active in support of the 'green movement', acknowledging at the same time that a 'made in the USA' label would be negative and counterproductive. History is being made now in this region. Devising a U.S. foreign policy to deal with all the variables is huge.

In summary Dr. Haass said the "future is likely to be choppy with bad days and good days", but lots is happening.

-Ambassador Marilyn McAfee