Contemporary Cases in U.S. Foreign Policy

From Terrorism to Trade

Fifth Edition

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The "war on terrorism" began in the early 1990s, escalated with the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and came into full fruition with the terrorist attacks on New York City and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. As a result, two U.S. administrations made war on Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda network and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan that provided it sanctuary. Following years of warfare in Afghanistan, the Obama administration employed a surge strategy against the Taliban in order to pacify the country sufficiently to enable U.S. troops to come home.

Targeted killings have become a staple in the U.S. war on terrorism. However, U.S. foreign policymakers took a bold step by authorizing the assassination of Osama bin Laden. Although the intelligence clues were tantalizing, officials could not be sure the potential target in the house in Abbottabad was actually bin Laden, so a decision had to be made under conditions of high uncertainty. Policy failure was a real possibility if the target proved not to be bin Laden, and the mission risked long-term damage to U.S. relations with the government and military of Pakistan, as well as raising again the ethical questions about targeted killings as a policy tool.
A number of American neoconservatives who had long advocated the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq emerged as key officials in the George W. Bush administration. Following the September 11 attacks and the initial retaliation against Afghanistan, they made the case for going after Saddam. Relying on their interpretations of the president's commander-in-chief powers and a congressional authorization to use force, White House officials conducted the invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq with as little input from outsiders as possible. However, the costs of this presidential decision proved to be unexpectedly high.

PART II NUCLEAR SECURITY POLICY

4 The Nuclear Standoff between the United States and Iran: Muscular Diplomacy and the Ticking Clock 102
THOMAS PRESTON

For more than 50 years, U.S.-Iranian relations have been plagued by policy conflicts heightened by mutual misunderstandings and suspicions. Recent diplomatic efforts to resolve international concerns over the Iranian nuclear program have been stymied by intransigence on both sides. Both the Bush and Obama administrations have sought international support for sanctions tough enough to push Iranians to the negotiating table and allow international inspections of their facilities. The question remains whether sanctions can force a change in policy in Tehran.

5 The United States and North Korea: Avoiding a Worst-Case Scenario 132
PATRICK JAMES AND ÖZGÜR ÖZDAMAR

U.S. fears of a North Korean nuclear weapons program date back to the 1980s. Although a 1994 Agreed Framework seemed to represent a solution to the dilemma of North Korean nuclear arms, each side has since taken provocative actions that alarmed the other. George W. Bush's inclusion of North Korea as part of an "axis of evil" was followed by two different nuclear bomb tests by North Korea, as well as missile testing that alarmed North Korea's neighbors. Both the Bush and Obama administrations have sought multilateral diplomatic negotiations to resolve the threats posed by these weapons tests.
In 2008, Congress enacted a proposal that originated with President George W. Bush in 2005 to approve an unprecedented nuclear trade pact with India by removing a central pillar of U.S. nonproliferation policy. Despite the numerous political challenges confronting the Bush administration, the initiative won strong bipartisan support. The struggle to pass the agreement demonstrates a classic tradeoff between the pursuit of broad multilateral goals such as nuclear nonproliferation and advancement of a specific bilateral relationship. It reveals enduring fault lines in executive branch relations with Congress and focuses on three principal questions: How did the agreement seek to advance U.S. national security interests? What were the essential elements of the prolonged state-of-the-art lobbying campaign to win approval from skeptics in Congress? What are the agreement's actual benefits—and costs—to U.S. nonproliferation efforts?

PART III DIPLOMATIC POLICY

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The Obama administration entered office with a campaign pledge to reengage the international community with a more open, multilateral, and problem-solving spirit. Within days of Obama's inauguration, Obama was called by Russian President Medvedev, who sought a reduction in tensions with the United States. The Obama administration identified a number of issues on which Russian help was sought, beginning with a replacement for the START Treaty. Despite the efforts of both presidents, it still took more than a year to get signatures on a New START Treaty, and that was supposed to be one of the easier items on the reset agenda.

Friendly Tyrants? The Arab Spring and the Egyptian Revolution 222
STEPHEN ZUNES

The Arab Spring caught U.S. foreign policymakers by surprise, and when it moved from Tunisia to Egypt, conflicting U.S. national interests were impacted. On one hand, the United States actively promotes the spread of democracy—particularly in the Middle East. On the other, the Mubarak regime in Egypt—albeit repressive and corrupt—was a long-time friend and ally of the United States.
Obama administration officials were initially torn between support for Mubarak and the message that sent to other allies in the region and support for the Egyptian masses, but they finally sided with the people.

Chen Guangcheng: The Case of the Blind Dissident and US-China Relations 249
JOYCE P. KAUFMAN

Supporting human rights in China has long been a U.S. concern, but in 2012 that concern took on a very human face. Chen Guangcheng, a blind Chinese dissident under long-term house arrest for challenging the regime’s actions, unexpectedly sought asylum in the U.S. Embassy in Beijing. Suddenly, his situation confronted U.S. diplomats with a crisis-like challenge: how to do the right thing by him and his family without embarrassing the Chinese government, hurting US-China trade, damaging overall US-China relations, or sabotaging an upcoming visit by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Ultimately, a solution was found that seemed to satisfy all concerned.

PART IV ECONOMIC AND TRADE POLICY

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THOMAS LAIRSON

In 2007, a housing bubble began to burst in the United States. As a result, more and more banks and financial institutions became the holders of “toxic” assets, the true values of which were unknown. Not knowing their exposure, banks and financial institutions cut back on lending to protect themselves, creating a credit crisis that quickly spread around the world. The outgoing Bush administration had to find a way to bail out the banks and get credit moving again, and the new Obama administration had to find a way to coordinate international responses to promote global economic recovery. This case demonstrates both the interconnectedness of the global economy and the rise of state capitalism.

Sino-American Trade Relations: Privatizing Foreign Policy 316
STEVEN W. HOOK AND FRANKLIN BARR LEBO

Thirty years after the United States and China established economic relations, the two continue to exchange complaints about each other’s trade practices. China moved from the status of a “strategic partner” under the Clinton administration to a “strategic competitor” under the Bush administration. Now the Obama
administration is dealing with China as an emerging economic power, seeking the appropriate balance between protecting U.S. interests and taking advantage of all China offers.

12 The Politics of Climate Change: Will the US Act to Prevent Calamity? 347
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The George Bush, Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama administrations have struggled with the issue of how to respond to global climate change. The U.S. government's reluctance to reduce fossil fuel emissions to the levels dictated by the 1997 Kyoto Protocol led some states and cities to set their own emissions reduction targets. The Obama administration participated in follow-up meetings, but due to the entrenched and widely divergent positions taken by both developed and developing states, it was only able to attain informal, voluntary pledges of future emissions reductions.

PART V NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEGAL POLICY

LOUIS FISHER

In late 2005, news reports revealed that after the September 11 attacks, the Bush administration's National Security Agency was authorized to eavesdrop on international telephone calls by U.S. citizens and residents. Although in 1978 a special federal court had been created for just such circumstances, Bush administration officials had chosen not to seek court warrants to authorize the eavesdropping. Facing a near revolt in Congress, the Bush administration pledged to seek court warrants before intercepting the calls of U.S. citizens in the future, but it was not clear to what extent such warrantless wiretapping was curtailed by the Bush administration. The Obama administration and the federal courts continue to try to find the right balance between civil liberties and unilateral executive power in the name of national security.

14 The Rights of Detainees: Determining the Limits of Law 409
LINDA CORNETT AND MARK GIBNEY

What legal rights do detainees in the “war on terrorism” have? Are they prisoners of war, criminals, or something else entirely? The Bush administration's policies that such detainees largely lacked legal rights have been generally overturned by the courts, so the Bush
administration sought to try them before military tribunals. Although the Obama administration initially sought to try these cases in the U.S. criminal court system, that effort largely failed, and the legal rights of detainees remain unclear.

The International Criminal Court: National Interests versus International Norms 435
DONALD W. JACKSON AND RALPH G. CARTER

Despite the U.S. characterization of itself as "a nation of laws," it has long wanted to protect U.S. officials and citizens from frivolous prosecution by the UN's International Criminal Court. President Clinton was enthusiastic about the Court so long as indictments had to be approved by the UN Security Council—where the United States could protect itself with a veto. George W. Bush rejected the idea of the court, and President Obama has shown he is not keen on signing treaties the Senate will not support. All the while, the court continues to take on new cases, the majority of them involving African states. How far do international legal norms extend?

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