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From: Sullivan, Jacob J <SullivanJJ@state.gov>
Sent: Monday, August 27, 2012 9:20 AM
To: H
Subject: Fw: Les Gelb, "The Elusive Obama Doctrine," The National Interest, 8/22/2012

Here you go.

----- Original Message -----

From: Leslie H. Gelb [mailto:]
Sent: Wednesday, August 22, 2012 01:50 PM
To: Sullivan, Jacob J
Subject: Les Gelb, "The Elusive Obama Doctrine," The National Interest, 8/22/2012

B6

Dear Mr. Sullivan:

Leslie H. Gelb writes in The National Interest: Obama captured the political center at home on foreign policy - a feat for a Democrat - because he avoided costly mistakes. He understood the limits of U.S. power, but not its strengths when encased in a good strategy, and thus failed to achieve solutions to big problems abroad.

The full text of the piece is included below.

<http://nationalinterest.org/article/the-elusive-obama-doctrine-7340>

Sincerely,

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The Elusive Obama Doctrine

By Leslie H. Gelb

August 22, 2012

Leaving aside political and ideological malcontents as well as defenders of the faith, it seems to me that three points can be made fairly regarding President Barack Obama's foreign-policy and national-security record.

First, he has captured the potent political center, a considerable feat for any Democrat. He's done so mainly by staying out of big, costly trouble. He further helped himself by co-opting some of the popular hard-nosed rhetoric and actions of traditional realists not generally associated with Democrats. Right-wing extremists did their part by practically conceding the middle ground with their unrelenting hawkishness. All of this permitted Obama to outmaneuver the Republicans and

hold the center. In doing so, he has given Democrats their first real shot at being America's leading party on foreign policy since Franklin Roosevelt and the earliest days of Harry Truman.

This has been nothing short of a political coup that could reverse long-standing Republican electoral advantages on national security.

Second, Obama managed a complex range of tactical challenges quite well, improving significantly on the international position he inherited from George W. Bush and generally bolstering America's reputation. Specifically, he managed America's exit from Iraq well and developed a new, focused and effective military strategy to counter terrorists. Inevitably, experts will quarrel over whether Obama could have done more of this or less of that. But on the whole, he guided America capably through the kinds of problems that often had turned sour in administrations past. Even where Obama took wrong turns-and there were a number of these-he mostly sidestepped costly mistakes, with the exception of Afghanistan. He was aided in avoiding such big errors-quite an accomplishment-by possessing a clear sense of the limitations of American power.

Third, while Obama saw what American power could not do, he failed to appreciate what American power could do, especially when encased in good strategy. Thus, his principal shortcoming was failing to formulate strategy and understand its interplay with power. He should be faulted here, even though most who fault him usually fail to produce their own viable strategies-those magical brews of picturing pitfalls and opportunities, hammering out attainable objectives and focusing the use of power. To this day, Obama's Afghanistan strategy seems little more than a disjointed list of tactics. More sorrowfully on the strategic front, he has yet to put economic resurgence and U.S. economic power at the core of the national-security debate, where they must be, for an effective national-security policy in the twenty-first century. To be sure, he has spoken of this need on occasion, but in his hands it has seemed more a rhetorical stepchild than a key ingredient of international power and successful strategy. Without strategy and without economic renewal to power it, Obama neither has achieved lasting strategic breakthroughs nor laid the groundwork for them later on.

Those who have easy solutions for foreign-policy challenges don't know very much about foreign policy. I've tried to be mindful of the great difficulties and of reasonably varied policy perspectives-and of the fact that, in the course of events, I've changed my own mind on matters small and large. I am mindful, too, that strange occurrences often attend the months preceding presidential elections.

Obama's position at the political center in U.S. foreign policy has enabled him to deflect classic Republican charges of liberal weakness that always kept Democrats on the defensive. He and his team also adopted much of the realist language of "interests" and "power," which further enhanced public confidence in him. Holding center field allowed Obama to move both left and right to block attacks or gain support. At times, though, such political gain came at the cost of contradictory actions that confused audiences both domestic and foreign. As for unhappy liberals, Obama often has flicked them away almost as easily as Republicans have.

In taking over the middle, Obama had help from a centrist-oriented Bill Clinton, who certainly was an elusive target for Republicans in the 1996 elections. However, Clinton's immunity often derived from his tiptoeing around international issues rather than boldly seizing the center. Obama seized that center. It must be said that, during the Clinton and Obama years, Republicans contributed to their own decline with unadulterated hawkish rhetoric. The 9/11 events briefly boosted Bush and Republican hawkishness, but that faded soon enough.

Obama earned the people's trust. He and his new Democrats averted the usual hellholes because they understood the limits of American power far better than Bush had, particularly when it came to the shortcomings of military force. Yes, the United States had military superiority after the Cold War. Bush and the neocons saw this clearly. But they went on to draw the wrong conclusion-namely, that the way to exercise that superiority was to threaten force and wage war. Obama and his minions grasped the reality that American superiority can prevail in conventional wars against nonsuperpowers (driving Iraq out of Kuwait), in operations to decapitate regimes in their capital cities (Saddam Hussein in Baghdad; the Taliban in Kabul) and in commando-like operations. But unlike the Bush contingent, the Obamanites saw

that conventional military superiority cannot pacify countries or resolve civil wars and vast internal conflicts. With the notable exception of Afghanistan, the new Democrats respected this reality.

Once in office, Obama aided himself politically by quickly ditching the liberal foreign-policy agenda of his campaign. By the end of his first year, he had quietly abandoned promises on global warming and Guantánamo. The former proved much too expensive in the short run, and the latter had become a symbol of liberal naïveté. He hushed conservative critics with a more skeptical tone on Palestinian-Israeli talks and a tougher stance on Iran and North Korea. He guarded himself further by stiffening his position on economic and humanitarian issues with China and stressing his pro-human-rights posture on Russia.

Obama then deflected the Republicans' remaining bullets with his amplified and winning war against terrorists. He topped the antiterror charts when, in the face of considerable risk, he ordered the killing of Osama bin Laden in May 2011. He punctuated this by eliminating Anwar al-Awlaki, another monster, in September 2011. Instead of sending in the troops to fight open-ended land wars, he fought the terrorists with special-operations teams and drones. Whatever you think of his administration's tendency to leak news of its victories or the ethics of having a "kill list," in his four years, Obama has taken the fight to our enemies and dealt them a staggering blow.

Only buckshot remained in the Republican political arsenal. The GOP was reduced to complaining about Obama's abandoning Bush's democracy-promotion agenda, delaying the elimination of Egypt's and Libya's dictators, not taking "action" to remove Syrian president Bashar al-Assad and generally forsaking the Arab Spring. Obama barely had to respond, given the prevailing political sentiment. Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton must have been jealous.

But Obama surely knows that history is closing in and will be seeking real accomplishments. He has to be aware that at some point even the sleepy press will ask: "Where's the beef?"

This lack of beef brings us to the major hole in Obama's foreign policy—the paucity of genuine strategic thinking. While the president's political leeway was constricted on most domestic issues, he had a relatively free hand on foreign policy, especially after he demonstrated he could handle issues reasonably well. To be sure, he stayed attentive and responsive to conservative attacks on his actions abroad. For the most part, however, he made foreign policy his turf and ran a highly centralized one-man show. The cost of this overconcentration was that he usurped even the details of policy from his principal cabinet officers and thus left himself little time to conceive and craft a long-range strategy. Fashioning strategy takes both time and experience, neither of which Obama possessed. Further, there was a deeper impediment still—his personal predilections and personality. He was not built for strategizing. Strategy calls for making bets and taking risks that the strategist must stick to over time, come what may. Strategy requires reducing flexibility, cutting off options to follow a certain course and not getting overwhelmed by details. These traits, too, ran counter to Obama's disposition to shift nimbly and keep options open. Strategy requires sticking to your guns, with some discomfort, in the face of pressures to trim sails.

Strategy is also about figuring out precisely how to use the power you have. Even with the decline in America's economy and the shifting sands of international affairs, one remaining constant is that nations the world over still recognize Washington as the indispensable leader. America never had the power to order others around—not after World War II nor at the Cold War's end. But now more than at any point since America's global reign began, other countries have the power to go their own way and say no to Washington. America may be the only nation that can lead, but with less relative power, it needs good strategy more than ever.

Such strategic considerations are at the heart of the exercise of power. Obama does not have an overarching strategy, nor did Bill Clinton or George W. Bush. George H. W. Bush did: end the Cold War without a hot war by helping Soviet leaders dismantle their empire. President Nixon and Henry Kissinger did as well: bury the ill effects of the Vietnam War by skywriting America's unique diplomatic power, make peace between Egypt and Israel, open up relations with Communist China, and use that as leverage against Moscow and ties to Moscow against Beijing. Best of them all, President Truman created two handfuls of international institutions for the exercise of America's economic power—the IMF, the World Bank, the UN, the Marshall Plan, NATO and more. In the face of Soviet military superiority in Europe and Chinese superiority in Asia, that power was key for Truman, as it was for Dwight Eisenhower. Through these institutions,

and thanks to sustained U.S. economic growth and superior military technology, Washington implemented the brilliant policies of containment and deterrence.

The difficulty with presidents who don't have strategies is convincing them that they actually don't have them and that they do need them. George W. Bush seemed to believe that military assertiveness constituted a strategy. Bill Clinton subordinated international strategy to domestic politics. Obama appears to think that common sense and flexibility constitute a strategy. The result is that leaders around the world often puzzle over what Obama is seeking and how. It's not that these leaders have their own strategy, but there is a much better chance that they'll go along with Obama if they believe he has a plausible one.

To understand this gap, it's helpful to survey the evolution of Obama's approach to world affairs. When he took the oath of office, Washington's relations with the world were, to put it kindly, in a state of disrepair. Initially, Obama tried to be forthcoming and understanding to all. He offered talks with Iran and North Korea, and he made conciliatory gestures toward China and Russia. He opened a welcoming hand to Arabs and Muslims in a June 2009 speech in Cairo, which he underscored by not traveling a few extra miles to Israel. Europeans expressed pleasure at his un-Bushian willingness to consult them, appreciate their points of view and recommit America to an early exit from Iraq. But with little to build upon and a declining U.S. economy, these initiatives stalled, and high hopes abroad began to dim. What follows is a rapid run-through of my observations on some of the major issues.

Nowhere was Obama's understanding of the limitations of American power better executed than in Iraq. Bush signed a pact for the full withdrawal of U.S. forces by the end of 2011, and it was clear to all—save the neocons—that the Iraqis would not budge on that. Obama took out the troops. Republicans tried to attack but got nowhere. Most Americans realized that staying would expose U.S. soldiers further without having much effect on Iraq's various troubles. However the public may have felt about the toll in American lives and money, it now seemed relieved. And the negative consequences in the Gulf area have been minute. The real strategic blunder came when Bush destroyed Iraq, leaving Iran as the only major regional power.

In Afghanistan, Obama made the opposite call, yielding to the pressure to escalate. He quickly became bogged down due to the casualties and costs, Afghan corruption and inefficiency, Pakistani duplicity in providing safe havens to the Taliban and so on. Only as his reelection campaign approached did he commit to a limited war-fighting strategy and eventual withdrawal. But questions linger over how many troops will remain after combat forces are withdrawn in 2014 and for how long. Perhaps Obama simply is trying to cover up retreat in an election year. Perhaps he still believes in some of his old danger-and-victory rhetoric about Afghanistan. Or perhaps he still doesn't quite know what to do.

Obama's policies on the nuclear bad guys—Iran and North Korea (and don't forget Pakistan)—have been mixed. After early days of conciliation, Obama's policy on Iran has been mostly hard-line, a clarity blessed by U.S. and Israeli politics. And it's been half right. On the plus side, he's gotten most major nations to impose a formidable list of economic sanctions and stepped up U.S. military presence in the region. But pressure alone, no matter how formidable, hasn't been and won't be sufficient to settle matters with Iran. Sanctions won't work unless teamed with a reasonable proposal. If the U.S. goal is to eliminate Iran's nuclear program altogether, the risk of war will be high. If the goal is to restrict that program to energy and make it very difficult for Tehran to develop and hide weapons-grade material, diplomacy has a chance.

So far, Tehran wants almost all sanctions lifted without giving clear indications of its bottom line. The American-led side insists on a step-by-step approach and won't concede Iran's right to produce uranium enriched to 20 percent, a short jump to weapons-grade quality. Neither side will budge, and nothing will happen before November. The same holds for the already nuclear-capable North Korea. Obama tried talking, but like his predecessors, he flopped. For all Pyongyang's threats, however, its leadership seems to respect deterrence—buttressed by Beijing's aversion to another Korean war.

To me, more worrisome than North Korea or Iran is our sometime ally Pakistan. Pakistan already has damaged antiproliferation efforts by divulging nuclear secrets to ignobles the world over. With its unstable domestic politics and possession of over a hundred nuclear weapons (and growing), it has to rank well ahead of Iran and North Korea in likelihood to use nuclear weapons or give them to terrorists.

Obama's policies toward China, Russia and India have had their inevitable ups and downs, without crises. From here on, presidents will be judged in large measure by how well they manage affairs with China, the other superpower. At the outset, Obama faced the improbable circumstance of Chinese leaders liking his predecessor, who didn't arouse the usual Chinese suspicions about scheming Americans. Obama has not had an easy time commanding their respect. To them, he's been sometimes too hard, sometimes too soft, sometimes both. They certainly didn't like the Obama team's policy and resource pivot from Europe and the Middle East to Asia, China's turf. To China, it smacked of a new containment policy and of Washington's refusal to allow Beijing its day in the sun.

Obama has a genuine desire to work out differences with China, provided he can satisfy three key constituencies: 1) China's neighbors, who want an unobtrusive U.S. bubble of protection from Beijing; 2) humanitarians, who believe that strategic concerns should be subordinated to democratization and human rights; and 3) conservatives, who fear growing Chinese military might. All represent legitimate U.S. concerns.

Obama has tried to calm Beijing somewhat by reframing the pivot as more of a "rebalancing." Thus, even as Obama transfers U.S. military resources to Asia, he correctly is attempting to shift the main theater of competition from security to economics. He boldly and rightly expanded plans for the Trans-Pacific Partnership, going beyond free trade to the aggressive protection of intellectual-property rights and other matters. At the same time, however, he has tried to comfort China's neighbors over key issues such as the South China Sea. These neighbors want it all ways-U.S. protection but not so much as to anger Beijing and risk Chinese trade and investment. In other words, they want Washington to take the heat, not them.

Relations with China are nothing like those with the old Soviet Union. There was no economic dimension to Cold War politics. In U.S.-Chinese relations today, economics is central. Each is a major trader and investor with the other, and China holds more than a trillion dollars of U.S. debt. While common economic interests certainly do not guarantee peace, they sure help. The main point is this: events in Asia and elsewhere will go China's way unless America's economy revives-a key point that Obama hasn't sufficiently stressed to Americans.

From a low point under Bush, U.S. relations with Moscow had nowhere to go but up. Obama hit the "reset" button to start a new relationship. Sometimes, this produced good feelings; other times, there were increased tensions. Particularly troublesome to Moscow have been U.S. interventions, actual and potential, in other countries. Russia worries about U.S. interference in Ukraine and Georgia as well as in places like Syria. Yet Moscow has cooperated with Washington on Afghanistan logistics, nukes in Iran and North Korea, and antiterrorism issues generally.

The reset button has had its offs and ons, and the relationship hasn't been elevated to the strategic partnership Obama wanted. But it's still worth trying, especially with Vladimir Putin reensconced as president. To make it work, U.S. leaders must prepare to be seen side by side atop the mountain with Russian leaders. That's how they see themselves, and Washington should treat them that way. It's a small price to pay for Russia's diplomatic cooperation. American leaders can't ignore human-rights and democracy concerns, but for now they will need to temper the rhetoric to get Moscow's power aligned with America's on difficult world issues.

The would-be strategic partnership with India has yet to bloom, and if it ever does it's not clear what form it will take. Like many of its neighbors to the east, India wants China to be distracted with America as it flexes its muscles. At the same time, New Delhi is deciding when and how much to embrace Washington. And it is India that will do the deciding. So far, Washington's devotion to forging this strategic partnership (against China, unspoken) has been mostly unrequited. Washington has given India a free ride on inspecting military-run nuclear facilities. In return, New Delhi has been quite stingy. In a huge deal last year, India snubbed U.S. jet fighters and chose to buy Russian and French ones instead. India is still figuring itself out, and both New Delhi and Washington are calibrating how far they can go without alienating the Chinese.

Obama's policy of humanitarian intervention and democracy promotion has been inconsistent. Such is the trouble for every president who must balance values and hard interests.

The most dramatic problems have been Libya and Syria. Obama rushed into Libya to help America's allies crush a dictator. It was a tricky decision. Washington couldn't ignore the pleas of friends who had fought alongside Americans in the two big contemporary wars. Yet the eager interveners hadn't the foggiest idea whether they were helping future Islamic extremists or potential democrats. It is a welcome sign that Libyans bucked the regional trend of electing Islamists in their July elections but nothing to warrant a proper exhale. For now, the Obama team is happy it eliminated an Arab dictator to prove America's democratic wares.

Not so, so far, in Syria. Unlike in Libya, Obama is wary of the potential sinkhole and rightly so—even as the neocons, as always, beat their war drums. And unlike in Libya, where the Arab League encouraged intervention, Obama has been spared its pressure to use force against the Assad regime. Nobody wants to take the military lead because of the blame that may come later. The hope is that Moscow, a supporter of Assad, may pull the plug on its ally and save everyone else from having to go in.

There is a big strategic question mark over Syria. Will it miraculously become calm and democratic? Will it become a radical Sunni state tied to Al Qaeda? Will Iran lose the future Syria as an ally, thus driving Tehran from its main Mideast outpost? Those at Syria's borders are bracing for the worst.

The day may come when Washington can help Arabs toward a freer life. But that day still is not near, as the Arab Spring screams both hope and danger.

For Egypt, there is so much to say and so little that can be done. It embodies all America's dreams and nightmares about societies progressing from dictatorship to democracy, with little or no grounding in democratic traditions and institutions. The fear, of course, is that dictators relatively friendly to Washington will be replaced by new dictators harsher to their own people and unreceptive to Washington. Hosni Mubarak was a corrupt dictator indeed, and it's just babble to argue that America could have kept him in power and/or moved him toward democracy. He seemed dug in forever. Yet when Tahrir's moment came, the dictator disappeared in the blink of an eye.

Obama now must choose between a corrupt and nondemocratic Egyptian military, possibly amenable to American interests, and the people's choice: a Muslim Brotherhood that might be moderate now but extreme once in control. If the Muslim Brotherhood strips off its Clark Kent suit to become Islamist Superman, there will be hell to pay for Egyptians, Israelis and Americans.

The choice now would be no better had Obama immediately dumped Mubarak and sided with the protestors. The latter had little power and no political organization, demonstrated by their poor performance in elections. Indeed, Libya aside, liberals throughout the Arab lands are unprepared to compete with Islamists for power. With no obvious and viable ally, Obama has little choice but to keep lines out to most parties, as is his wont. He has been mostly cautious about the unknown tides of the Arab Spring, and for that he deserves commendation. But there is a future to plan for, and it is not too soon for a U.S.-led economic-aid project to strengthen the cadres of moderate reform in the Arab world.

Obama does not merit high marks for managing Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. He did virtually nothing to prod Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas to prepare his people for compromise, and he allowed Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu to denigrate the negotiation process. At a joint press conference, Netanyahu lectured Obama on the evils of a peace accord built around the 1967 borders, and the U.S. president just sat there. The modified '67 borders, endorsed by several of Netanyahu's predecessors, have been America's position on peace for a half century. With November approaching, an American clarification of this issue has to wait until 2013. But at that point, Washington must be ready for straight talk with Israel and the Palestinians, backed up by the blessings of Arab states and an Arab economic-development plan for Palestine.

Latin America offers an opportunity largely ignored by Obama, and Africa represents a growing threat about which he can do little. Brazil is the world's sixth-biggest economy, and the Mexican economy is booming. Even with America's own difficulties and other international priorities, the Southern Hemisphere has commanded shockingly little time from the White House. The administration put muscle into passing trade agreements with Panama and Colombia only because it had the GOP votes in Congress. At the Cartagena summit in 2012, Obama was slammed for his failure to roll up his

sleeves on either the Cuban embargo or drugs. The most interest Americans showed in the region came when Secret Service officers were found to be cavorting with prostitutes.

In Africa, some countries have strengthened their democracies, though many are now gravely threatened by corruption, internal butchers or Islamic extremists. The United States and others feign interest, but absent direct implications for other continents, outside lights rarely will shine on Africa for some time to come.

Even as fashion now runs to Asia, Europe remains America's principal economic, diplomatic and security partner. Asia will never replace it-though Obama doesn't seem to see it that way.

Our European friends have fallen on miserable economic times, and Washington can offer little help. But the degree to which Europeans have gone their own way is worrisome. Eastern European leaders are unhappy about Obama's apparent lack of consideration for their feelings about the Russian bear. And Obama did not handle issues regarding that region's missile-defense system in a way that inspired confidence.

When the Obama administration announced what sounded like a strategic shift in emphasis toward Asia, it demonstrated a lack of sensitivity to all Europeans in a time of great need. Explanations and qualifications flowed from Washington, but the damage was done. Not surprisingly, early European acclamations of Obama-fueled by hopes that he was more in tune with world affairs than Bush-have mostly dissipated.

In no theater of the world has Obama's lack of a strategic vision had starker consequences than in Afghanistan. The White House has altered its objectives there so frequently, it's hard to follow what America is fighting for now. First, it was to defeat Al Qaeda in retribution for 9/11. Then, it became to defeat the Taliban as well because the Taliban might let terrorists back into the country. Later, it was somehow to prevail in Afghanistan to bolster moderates in Pakistan and safeguard Pakistani nukes. This last objective was nothing short of psychedelic. It was never clear how any outcome in the wilds of Afghanistan, no matter how positive, could save a messed up, corrupt, multiethnic country of 190 million where the military and the Islamists are the only real political forces. Without realistic goals to give his actions ballast, Obama increased the U.S. military presence more than threefold from the approximately thirty thousand troops he inherited. He gave them a counterinsurgency and nation-building mandate that stretched credulity. Finally, now, he will withdraw all combat troops by 2014 and drop his broad counterinsurgency strategy in favor of a sensible, targeted counterterrorist approach. For all that, he still hasn't decided the size of the residual force after 2014. It could be as high as thirty thousand and hang around indefinitely.

Administration officials say that their objective is to remove "almost" all U.S. forces in "coming years" while making Afghanistan more secure. And they aim to achieve these goals by taking three steps: exploring a deal with the Taliban, improving the performance of Kabul and Afghan security forces, and enticing Afghanistan's neighbors to accept greater responsibility. But what the administration has here is a list-not a strategy.

A strategy starts with the essential judgment that the United States simply does not have vital interests in any major sustained presence in Afghanistan, but Afghanistan's neighbors do-and it is to them, therefore, that Washington's strategy must be directed. It is they who will have to worry about what happens after U.S. forces depart, they who will have to deal with the drugs, the refugees and the Islamic extremists that will flow across their borders-not the United States. As for U.S. concerns about Afghanistan as a global headquarters for terrorists, that time has passed. Today, terrorists operate worldwide, certainly more in the Middle East than in Afghanistan.

Task number one, then, is to convince Afghanistan's neighbors that the United States is pulling almost all of its forces out, and soon, and that America no longer will bear the primary burden. These countries must be convinced that while Washington can live with an anarchic Afghanistan-or worse-they cannot. Otherwise, the neighbors will be happy just to sit back and watch. Afghan parties, including the Taliban, must understand that they will have to deal with these neighbors in America's absence, and the neighbors must be made to see that they must shoulder the burdens or suffer the consequences. None of this is to say that Washington should simply walk away and hope these countries see the light. The United States still will have to play a leading role in getting this new coalition organized.

In Afghanistan and elsewhere, Washington has to persuade key countries that U.S. power is being used to solve common problems. America's future power must be based on mutual indispensability: the United States is the indispensable leader because it alone can galvanize coalitions to solve major international problems (most nations know this); other nations are indispensable partners in getting the job done. Others must see clearly that U.S. actions serve their interests as well as America's and that their interests cannot be advanced save by American leadership.

This principle of mutual indispensability, with Washington in the lead, must be the intellectual heart of strategy-but what will keep it pumping is economics. Good strategy is a necessary but insufficient condition for success in the twenty-first century. Money, more money, innovation in management and technology, competitive and skilled workers, and an economy that can trade and invest with the best are also essential. The U.S. economy is the basis of America's military and diplomatic power and, of course, America's foreign economic power. Economics is now the principal currency of international affairs, the new precious coin of the realm. Of course, in certain matters, only force and traditional diplomacy are appropriate. But in most international transactions today, it's economic goodies given or withheld that turn heads.

Obama often speaks of the importance of America's economic strength. Yet he has not put this point at the core of his national-security agenda, and that's why he has fallen short. It's not enough to say, "Our nation must do this." He has to show how and inspire fear of failure-show how declining economic vitality destroys American power and undermines U.S. interests. He hasn't established this sense of urgency.

Eisenhower knew the magic here. When the Soviets threatened, he tied it to the U.S. economy. Moscow increased military spending? Ike said our country needed to launch a massive highway-building program so U.S. forces could crisscross the nation more readily. Moscow launched Sputnik? He insisted Congress vastly increase spending on math and science education "to catch up."

The greatest danger facing America today is economic stagnation and decline as we lose trade and jobs to more competitive and innovative countries. Obama must find the words to reverse the downward slope-to restore research, manufacturing skills and physical infrastructure. He's got to make Americans understand that without such rejuvenation, we cannot sustain America's lead in technological or military superiority.

Obama uttered these very thoughts. At West Point in December 2009, he said, "The nation that I'm most interested in building is our own." But he has only just begun to yoke together the American economy and American security. This should be the stuff of a national crusade, with flags flying and a political strategy to rally Americans. It's the kind of task great leaders are built for.

Leslie H. Gelb is president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations, a former senior official in the State and Defense Departments, and a former New York Times columnist. He is also a member of The National Interest's Advisory Council.

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