THE RESPONSIBILITY DOCTRINE

ACROSS ITS FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA, THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION HAS PURSUED A STRATEGY OF PRODDING OTHER NATIONS TO HELP SHOULDER THE BURDENS OF GLOBAL PEACE AND STABILITY.

BY NINA HACHIGIAN AND DAVID SHOBB

In one of the most memorable scenes in Mark Twain's Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Aunt Polly punishes Tom for skipping school by sentencing him to put a fresh coat of whitewash on their picket fence. Being an enterprising young man, Tom convinces other kids to join in, and they quickly line up to take turns painting the boards.

Twain's scene resembles recent U.S. diplomatic efforts to obtain greater contributions from the world's critical players. Getting other nations to play a larger constructive role is vital; in today's interconnected world, future peace and prosperity hinge on those nations' willingness to step up.

As President Barack Obama stressed on taking office, "Our power alone cannot protect us." Even a global superpower cannot mount effective responses to 21st-century challenges on its own. The United States needs partners to help bolster the global economy, prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, stem climate change, alleviate poverty and destroy terrorist networks.

Simple fairness says Americans shouldn't have to shoulder the burden of international problem-solving alone, especially as nations that have risen within the existing system seek greater prominence. And even if the U.S. were inclined to continue picking up the tab for protecting the global commons, fiscal realities will constrain it.

This recognition has led the administration to pursue a strategy — call it the "Responsibility Doctrine" — of prodding other nations to shoulder the burdens of fostering a stable, peaceful international order. Across its foreign policy agenda and with unprecedented emphasis, the administration has persistently sought contributions from other nations.

Real-world progress for the doctrine has been partial but significant. While deep, sustained cooperation among pivotal powers remains elusive, and many serious differences divide them, the vision of a world where the United States draws major powers into collective efforts is not imaginary; it is already happening.

The Responsibility Strategy

Under a responsibility doctrine, foreign policy is driven by the need to solve global problems and strengthen the multilateral norms and structures on which a viable 21st-century, rules-based order depends.

The aim is not simply to establish a balance of power, but to bring about a dynamic framework through which to practically address global challenges. The strategic premise is that emerging major and middle powers can become significant contributors to global peace and prosperity — whether co-opted or pressed into accepting responsibility along with influence.

Looking at the multilateral agenda's top-tier issues, it is clear that they represent vulnerabilities of the international system itself. Consider the consequences if the global economy couldn't sustain growth, terror groups carried out large-scale attacks, the club of nuclear-armed nations grew to 15, or the planet's temperature rose by four degrees Celsius.

Such matters can only be addressed through consistent, active cooperation among all the world's pivotal powers. Influential nations must fulfill basic civic duties — adhering to international laws and norms, contributing to global problem-
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change, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and other leaders took a share of credit for leading an international coalition to stop the slaughter of innocents.

But as the ill-fated Turkish and Brazilian attempt to mediate with Iran two years ago shows, collaborative leadership is not easy to orchestrate.

Withholding. At times the United States must pull back some of its own contributions, or threaten to do so, to induce others to do their part. For example, the NATO allies have spent decades arguing over Western European underinvestment in military capability.

While last year's intervention in Libya was an important display of European leadership, it also highlighted serious gaps in the continent's hard power. Much of the problem stems from the moral hazard of relying on the U.S. military presence, which Wash-

ington is now reducing.

Peer pressure. Another of the responsibility doctrine's techniques is to form coalitions with other nations to shape a country's behavior. This has long been standard practice in statecraft, but the Obama administration is bringing it to a new level with emerging powers.

In 2009 and 2010 Beijing assertively pressed its South China Sea territorial claims. In its role as security guarantor in the Pacific, the U.S. swiftly provided reassurance to rattled Southeast Asian nations.

The issue came to a head at a July 2010 meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, where Sec.

Clinton joined her regional counterparts in a forceful call for a multilateral solution to these disputes. While it continues to assert its claims, Beijing has moderated its tone somewhat.

The administration has also leveraged international peer pressure regarding China's undervalued currency. First, it encouraged countries like Brazil and Indonesia to highlight how an artificially low renminbi undermines their own exports. Washington also made China's currency an issue at the 2010 Group of 20 forum; as a re-

ult, the renminbi tends to strengthen.
prior to G-20 meetings, with a total increase of 14 percent over the past two years.

Helping close the sale back home. The administration has also tailored its requests of other governments to domestic political sensitivities. No foreign leader wants to be seen as doing the bidding of America, after all. So when U.S. officials press China to rebalance its economy from exports toward domestic consumption, they stress that Beijing’s own Five-Year Plan calls for exactly that shift.

Converting “rule-takers” to “rule-makers.” Many key multilateral norms and mechanisms are due for updating, and the emerging stakeholders should be actively involved. This is a valuable opportunity to strengthen their sense of ownership and constructive participation.

Recent climate change negotiations offer vital lessons in the need to adjust expectations and prepare for a steady slog. Because of the chaotic atmosphere at the December 2009 U.N. meeting in Copenhagen, the forum’s real achievements have gotten short shrift.

Thanks both to Pres. Obama’s personal intervention and heightened global scrutiny, China and India made their first-ever commitments to cut the carbon intensity of their economic growth, and China relented on measurement and reporting. Participating nations, comprising nearly the entire world, committed themselves to the goal of capping a maximum aggregate temperature increase at two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit).

Leveraging international institutions. The administration has greatly increased U.S. engagement with international institutions, taking advantage of their built-in mechanisms to spread the burden for maintenance of the rules-based order. For instance, United Nations member-states collectively contribute more than 100,000 peacekeepers a year, deployments that benefit the U.S. by bringing stability to war-torn regions. For every dollar the U.S. lends to the International Monetary Fund’s bailout mechanism, other governments collectively lend five.

The United States has pushed to ensure that any increase in voice that emerging powers get in international institutions is closely linked to increased contributions. At the IMF, an increase in voting shares automatically triggers an increase in mandated contributions.

The Group of 20’s annual leader summit has important symbolism in gathering emerging and established powers as peers, and rising powers have actually led the group into new areas such as economic development and anti-corruption. The G-20 has adopted a Mutual Assessment Process, whereby member-states review and critique each other’s growth plans. This motivates them to weigh domestic policy choices in the context of shared responsibility for a strong, balanced global economy.

In another tactic to induce responsible action, the United States has championed the Trans-Pacific Partnership, an exclusive institution-in-formation where responsibility is the price of admission. The TPP trade initiative sets high standards for labor, environmental and intellectual property protections, and only countries willing to meet them may negotiate their entry. While Asia’s largest trading nation, China, currently falls short of those goals, the TPP might prod Beijing to make improvements to meet the threshold for eligibility.

In other cases, the administration has sought to induce responsibility within institutions other pivotal powers value by highlighting when the institution is failing a basic test of credibility. In March, when the U.N. Security Council debated the Arab League peace plan for Syria, Sec. Clinton argued that withholding support for the plan “would mark a failure of our shared responsibility and shake the credibility of the United Nations Security Council.”

Leading by example. The administration has been explicit about the need for the United States to keep its own house in order as it calls on others to do their civic duty. Consider, for example, nuclear nonproliferation, a U.S. priority.

The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty represents a bargain between the world’s nuclear “haves” and “have-nots” requiring (a) that non-nuclear weapon nations stay that way and (b) that the world’s nuclear “haves” disarm. To keep the diplomatic upper hand in critical negotiations over Iran and North Korea’s nuclear programs, the United States has needed to show good faith in reducing its Cold War stockpile. Indeed, some Republican senators who voted for the U.S.-Russian New START arms treaty acknowledged this in the ratification debate.

The responsibility message. A consistent message about the duties of membership in the world community is also essential to the responsibility doctrine. Often, the strongest case for others to follow America’s lead is to argue in terms of civic obligations and the rules of the road. These themes have been a drumbeat of the foreign policy message in recent years.
In his first United Nations General Assembly address, for instance, Pres. Obama listed his initial steps to bring the United States into sync with the rest of the world, and then put them into perspective: “This cannot solely be America’s endeavor. Those who used to chastise America for acting alone in the world cannot now stand by and wait for America to solve the world’s problems alone. We have sought — in word and deed — a new era of engagement with the world. And now is the time for all of us to take our share of responsibility for a global response to global challenges.”

Calling out the irresponsible. A loud and clear message of responsibility is equally important when countries fail to step up. When Russia and China vetoed a recent U.N. resolution aimed at preventing further violence in Syria, the United States and its partners did not let them off easily.

“It’s quite distressing to see two permanent members of the Security Council using their veto while people are being murdered,” Sec. Clinton said in a blunt statement publicized around the world. “It is just despicable, and I ask whose side are they on? They are clearly not on the side of the Syrian people.”

British Foreign Secretary William Hague said Russia and China had “sided with the Syrian regime and its brutal suppression of the Syrian people in support of their own national interests.” And Morocco’s U.N. ambassador, the sole Arab member of the Security Council, voiced his “great regret and disappointment” at the double veto.

This public shaming did not sit well in Beijing and Moscow, and they were distinctly more forthcoming in the months afterward, though not enough to agree on a course of action.

Rhetoric vs. Reality

The gap between the palpable demand for international cooperation and the inadequate supply is one of the great quandaries of our interconnected age. While key powers agree on desired outcomes — ridding Iran and North Korea of nuclear weapons programs, rebalancing the global economy, alleviating chronic poverty — figuring out how to allocate the pain and work to reach these ends sometimes seems a Sisyphean task.

If the responsibility doctrine succeeds, emerging powers will internalize the duties that come with being a stakeholder. Here in the early stages of the process, these players are gradually gaining a sense of ownership over the major challenges confronting the world and a dawning awareness that shared problems must be solved.

The internal debates in China, India and elsewhere about these nations’ global roles are positive signs.

Just in recent years, nations united under U.S. leadership to keep the world economy from falling off a cliff in 2008-2009, protect the Libyan people from an imminent bloodbath and help depose their dictator, battle pirates off the Somali coast, decimate al-Qaeda’s leadership, contain a swine flu pandemic, repatriate nearly 800 kilograms of highly enriched uranium and isolate Iran like never before.

On some issues progress has fallen far short of what is needed. Climate change negotiations are devoting important new frameworks and commitments, but nowhere near what the science demands. China has revolved its renminbi 40 percent since 2005, but the larger challenge of rebalancing its economy is advancing slowly at best.

The Long Haul

Many of these problems have festered for years or decades, with nations avoiding paying the piper. For participants and onlookers alike, the process of breaking ingrained habits will test everyone’s patience. Nor do the political incentives help: the downside is immediate, while gratification comes years later.

Today’s leaders won’t repeat the order-building masterstrokes of their postwar predecessors at Bretton Woods or Dumbarton Oaks. Instead, the contemporary marks of leadership will be the diligence and dexterity to grind out steady progress.

Finally, the responsibility doctrine asks Americans to embrace a more expansive definition of international leadership. While America will remain the world’s indispensable power, it can only be effective by inducing others to act alongside it. Trying to block other nations from boosting their stature will not preserve American influence.

Instead the United States should focus on setting the global agenda and defining genuine success. Reaching solutions to critical global problems is more important than constantly affirming the U.S. as the unique and powerful leader the world already fully recognizes. Sec. Clinton expressed this crucial point when she said that “part of leading is making sure you get other people on the field.”

Indeed, the main justification for the responsibility doctrine is the reality that the times demand it. It has become one of the clichés of global interdependence that today’s challenges are too formidable for even a superpower to deal with on its own. But this particular cliché has the virtue of being true.