

THE CONCEPT OF ENGAGEMENT IN CONTEMPORARY US DIPLOMACY

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Modern diplomacy is conducted in a world of rapidly evolving global challenges: the spreading dangers of weapons of mass destruction; new and more malignant forms of terrorism; regional and sectarian conflicts; failed and failing states; global economic dislocation; and transnational health, energy and environmental concerns. Rarely can these issues be addressed unilaterally. In addition, diplomacy has moved beyond state to state relations to include non-state actors, including private sector entities, international organizations and NGOs, criminal cartels, militant groups, and local and international media.

The policy of Obama Administration has been to achieving U.S. foreign policy objectives and the administration believes that it requires global engagement: a new era of relations, based on “mutual interests and mutual respect.” What do they mean by

engagement, what place does it have in American diplomatic history, and how is this policy tool used in American diplomacy?

The Meaning of Engagement:

Engagement is a tool for modifying the behaviour of regimes with which a great power has significant disagreements. Heightened awareness of the costs associated with the use of sanctions or military forces us to search for policy alternatives.¹

Engagement is a tool of statecraft and is not about sweet talk. Nor is it based on the illusion that our problems with rogue regimes can be solved by engaging them through mutual talks. Engagement is not normalization; its goal is not to improve relations. It is not akin to detente, working for rapprochement, or appeasement. The goal of engagement is to change the other country's perception of its own interests and to be aware of realistic options, in order to modify its policies and behaviour. Engagement is a process, not a destination. It involves exerting

¹ Richard N. Haass: Honey and Vinegar: Incentives, Sanctions, and Foreign Policy, Brookings Institute Press, [2000].

pressure, by raising questions and hypothetical possibilities, and by probing the other country's assumptions and thinking. Above all, it involves testing how far the other country might be willing to go. Properly understood, the diplomacy of engagement means raising questions that the other country may wish to avoid or be politically unable to answer. It places the ball in the other country's court. Engagement, of course, comes with risks. These risks include distortion of issue by opponents, placement of pre-conditions to negotiate, legitimacy claim of rogue regimes and the targeted regime may remain in place or may be strengthened.²

The engagement policy signifies a trend that implies involvement and interaction as opposed to isolation. It is a willingness to continue to be involved actively in international affairs and to provide leadership rather than retreating from international responsibilities. It is a strategic agenda involving the carefully considered extension of incentives and penalties to influence other's behaviour. In this sense engagement implies a

² Such issues troubled some critics of the Bush administration's 2003 breakthrough that led to the normalizing of relations between the United States and Libya.

willingness to use positive incentives as a means of rewarding good behaviour.³ Thus the engagement includes extension of: (i) Positive incentives,⁴ (ii) Conditionality,⁵ (iii) Communication,⁶ and (iv) Interactive processes.⁷

What Place Does It Have In the American Foreign Policy?

There are four approaches, and four visions of US foreign policy that shape the way Americans think and argue about the world problems. **The Hamiltonians**, for example try to build a global order of trade and economic relations that may keep United States so rich that the Americans can afford to do what Britain used to do, which is to keep at bay the countries that threaten to take over US interests in either Europe or Asia, and for to defend such interests. In order to achieve these goals, United States may opt to build a coalition of likeminded forces against opposing counties and may bring them down, either by peace or war. **Jeffersonian** view says that the United States should not go

³ In this sense, it is a general dialogue between opposing countries. In fact it is a process of strategic interaction and use of non-coercive tool and initiatives to elicit corporative behaviour from the target opponents.

⁴ Rendell H. Schweller, *Engaging China: The Management of Emerging Power*, Routledge, New York.

⁵ Scott B. Lasensky, *Buying Peace and Security: The Peace Puzzle*, Cornell University Press.

⁶ Miun Nag Do, *Legal issues on Burma*, Columbia University, Journal No. 7, December 2000.

⁷ Richard N. Haass, id. n1

hand in glove with corporations. Such policy undermines democracy, as it involves US with despots abroad, and US will be supporting evil dictators because some American corporation might gain economic interest in the process. This school believes that such an approach may undermine democracy at home.

Wilsonians hold the belief in the international institutions like United Nations, and its agencies. According to this school, the United States should push its values around the world and should turn other countries into democracies whether they like it or not. For that the U.S should work multilaterally with international institutions. In order to achieve targeted goals US should support things like the International Criminal Court, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. For that US should not be unilateralist in its approach; and the human rights should be put ahead of trade, and so on.

Jacksonians, say “Don’t bother with people abroad, unless they bother you. But if they attack you, then do everything you can” [to defend your interests].⁸

How Policy Tool Stands Used In American Diplomacy

The case in hand is that of Iran deal on nuclear arms. In the deal, the Obama administration characterized their approach to the nuclear talks as part of a more comprehensive strategy to establish “a new equilibrium” between Sunnis and Shiites in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. The intention was to reduce US presence in the Middle East, and to keep better relations with Iran that could help to establish a new balance of power. And by following this policy a rapprochement has been made with Iran comparable to Richard M. Nixon’s breakthrough visit to China in 1972. It is now believed that in the light of agreement, it will be far more difficult for Iran to transform its civilian nuclear program into a weapons program. It is further believed that the agreement will not prevent a determined Iran from building a nuclear

⁸ Harry Kreisler, US Foreign Policy and the American Political Tradition, [Interview], Institute of International Studies, UC Berkeley, February 15, 2003.

weapon, it will make doing so much harder, and the extensive verification and inspection procedures will make it much easier to discover any such attempt.

The American administration views this agreement as: [putting] strong, verifiable limits on Iran's ability to develop nuclear weapon for at least the next 10 to 15 years and [this] is potentially one of the most consequential accords in recent diplomatic history, with the ability not just to keep Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon but also to reshape Middle East Politics.⁹

However, the Iran deal poses new challenges (for the Obama administration), the deal has ignited a domestic political fight, the administration is trying to placate its allies in the Middle East as they fear that Iran will use the economic boost of sanction relief to ramp up support for its militant proxies.

⁹ An Iran nuclear deal that reduces the chance of war, "International New York Times, July 14, 2015.

The deal has provoked sharp reactions across the Arab world, where major players are closely allied either with Iran or Saudi Arabia, and any gain by one is seen as a loss by the other.

There are fears too that the United States is pursuing a broader rapprochement with Tehran that could empower Iran. United States allies in the region, particularly Saudi Arabia, appear to be using opposition to the deal to lever increased assistance.¹⁰

The Obama administration however believes that the deal and the economic benefits it could bring will empower Iran's moderates and make it easier for the United States to work with them on regional issues.

This engagement policy and the Iran deal have brought new challenges for US administrations. These include:

- Selling the deal to Congress, (including doubters in the Democrats), it looks as if its approved from the congress may prove as difficult as reaching agreement with Iran.

¹⁰ William D. Hartung, The Arms and Security Project, the Centre for International Policy in Washington, 2013.

- After decades of war in the Middle East, it is still unclear whether the opponents will be able to muster public opinion or the views of a narrow, passionate core of hawkish conservatives and pro-Israel Democrats are going to prevail.
- Presently, the critics are preparing a large scale mobilization for the forthcoming August congressional session, presently, the lawmakers are in their home states and districts, and are engaging themselves to stoke opposition to the agreement in order to agitate before Congress to block the agreement.
- In case the deal is approved in the weakest and most pitiful way possible, its acceptance becomes questionable.
- At presents, the deal indicates a depth of division and that would put the whole venture into question.
- US president has to win over the majority of Congress, including hostile Republicans, and to focus on shoring up a Democratic base to sustain a veto.

The use of engagement as a policy tool has been constantly pursued by US diplomacy; reference can be made to the policy pursued in the case of China, Viet Nam, Cuba, Russian federation and Iran. As is evident engagement as a policy tool remains an important option in the American foreign policy. This tool has been used throughout American history for gainful and profitable pursuits and to restrict the global flash points to become threat for global security by neutralizing the force of their impact.

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