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Foreign Policy and National Security Post-Election --

Summary

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Michael O'Hanlon is a senior fellow with the 21st Century Defense Initiative and director of research for the Foreign Policy program at the Brookings Institution, where he specializes in U.S. defense strategy, the use of military force, and American foreign policy. O'Hanlon focuses his remarks on the state of affairs in Iran, Russia and China, and comments in less detail regarding the Middle East and Africa. He notes that American foreign policy during Obama's first term was very well executed by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and others, but cautions that the strategies employed then cannot simply be extended during the second term by the incoming Secretary of State, John Kerry. Instead, fundamental changes and new policies are necessary around the globe.

Key observations include:

- American foreign policy was very well executed during Obama's first term, in that Obama's team stayed on message and acted consistently with its strategies. That said, Obama took a pragmatic rather than visionary approach to foreign policy, and his first term was not marked by any major accomplishments or the resolution of any key foreign policy issues.
- Incoming Secretary of State John Kerry's job is going to be harder in many ways than Hillary Clinton's was, largely because the policies put in motion during Obama's first term cannot simply be continued.
- With regard to Russia, the Obama foreign policy team's aim was to implement a reset of the relationship between our two countries. It was clear that there

were some needless antagonisms on the part of the United States that could be mitigated.

- The Pentagon helped with the reset with Russia by more gradually implementing a missile defense plan for Europe, which was less provocative toward Russia. Further, Russia and the United States agreed on sanctions against Iran, and the Russians helped the United States open up logistics lines into northern Afghanistan.
- The reset with Russia capitalized on fairly straightforward - and effective - possibilities. Those immediate, one-offs are no longer available, however, and with Putin firmly ensconced in the Kremlin and the Syrian problem looming, John Kerry is in a difficult position.
- Perhaps the hardest decision facing Obama in the next year or two concerns Iran: Obama has said starkly and repeatedly that an Iranian nuclear weapon is unacceptable. If Iran continues to enrich uranium, should the United States go to war against Iran or not?
- Sanctions have been very effectively applied against Iran. The strategy is to apply enough pain so the Iranians will be willing to do a deal, but so far there is no sign that the Iranians want one. Again, John Kerry is going to be in a potentially very difficult position.
- Early in his first term, Obama reached out to China, expressing respect, recognizing the economic progress China has made, acknowledging our mutual economic interdependence, and asking to work together on climate change. His overtures were met with suspicion.
- In 2010 it became clear that China had abandoned its longstanding policy of rising peacefully, and the Obama foreign policy team had to revise its strategy and "pivot to Asia." Obama and Clinton gave highly visible speeches emphasizing the United States as a Pacific power, and we moved ships to Singapore and troops to Australia.
- The firm U.S. stance in the Pacific worked well, but such displays of resolve do not form the basis of a sustainable foreign policy towards China. Indeed, such a strategic rivalry would create the worst relationship for the United States with China since Nixon and Kissinger opened up relations in 1972.