



Foreign Policy Begins at Home: The Case for Putting America's House in Order

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The biggest threat to the United States comes not from abroad but from within. This is the provocative, timely, and unexpected message of Council on Foreign Relations President Richard N. Haass's *Foreign Policy Begins at Home*.

A rising China, climate change, terrorism, a nuclear Iran, a turbulent Middle East, and a reckless North Korea all present serious challenges. But U.S. national security depends even more on the United States addressing its burgeoning deficit and debt, crumbling infrastructure, second class schools, and outdated immigration system.

Foreign Policy Begins at Home describes a twenty-first century in which power is widely diffused. Globalization, revolutionary technologies, and the rise and decline of new and old powers have created a "nonpolar" world of American primacy but not domination. So far, it has been a relatively forgiving world, with no great rival threatening America directly. How long this strategic respite lasts, according to Haass, will depend largely on whether the United States puts its own house in order.

Haass argues for a new American foreign policy: Restoration. At home, the new doctrine would have the country concentrate on restoring the economic foundations of American power. Overseas, the U.S. would stop trying to remake the Middle East with military force, instead emphasizing maintaining the balance of power in Asia, promoting economic integration and energy self-sufficiency in North America, and working to promote collective responses to global challenges.

Haass rejects both isolationism and the notion of American decline. But he argues the United States is underperforming at home and overreaching abroad. *Foreign Policy Begins at Home* lays out a compelling vision for restoring America's power, influence, and ability to lead the world.

Foreign Policy Begins at Home: The Case for Putting America's House in Order Details

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Author : Richard N. Haass

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John says

Frustrating. Ends up being a kind of laundry list of specific policy reforms, capped off with the claim that what is needed to bring them about is "real leadership." Well...yes. We know. Now what? I agree with his assessment of many of the problems, and while I would quibble with some of his proposals for addressing them, in general they are sensible and clearly based on thoughtful and informed analysis (though I do not know that he is saying much that is really NEW, either in identifying the problems or in the proposed solutions). The problem is getting any of them— really: ANY of them— done. And Haass has very little to say about that, beyond suggesting that the current leadership needs to stop behaving in the way it has been. Again: we KNOW that. So now what?

Book says

Foreign Policy Begins at Home: The Case for Putting America's House in Order by Richard N. Haass

"Foreign Policy Begins at Home" is a fantastic, succinct and accessible book on foreign policy. American diplomat and accomplished author Richard N. Haass provides the public with a fair and even-handed book, in this edition he advocates for a new foreign policy of Restoration that argues for less foreign policy and a greater emphasis on domestic investment and policy reform. This insightful 212-page book is broken out into the following three parts: I. The Return of History, II. Restoration Abroad and III. Restoration at Home.

Positives:

1. A well-written, concise and even-handed book on foreign policy for the masses.
2. Haass has mastery of the important topic of foreign policy and is able to convey it in a lucid manner.
3. I really like the author's approach. He is direct, concise and his points are well grounded. He doesn't chew more than he can eat and is candid about the risks and challenges involved.
4. The book revolves around the following three themes: the United States is overreaching abroad, underperforming at home and underreach. "Call it underreach: the risk posed by what appears to be a growing lack of understanding by many Americans of the close relationship between the state of the world—how much stability, how much prosperity—and the state of the United States."
5. Makes it perfectly clear why we the United States must lead the globe. "No other country or groups of countries have the capacity, the experience, and the inclination to lead efforts to build global order."
6. Covers so much in so little time. "There are, of course, external challenges, including but hardly limited to a rising China, a militarized North Korea, an Iran possibly moving to acquire nuclear weapons, an unstable Pakistan, violent terrorists, and a warming planet."
7. Explains the most noteworthy features in the first half of the twenty-first century is nonpolarity. "Two factors—globalization and technology—contribute to nonpolarity."
8. Eye-opening facts. "China's GDP increased from less than \$400 billion in 1981 to more than \$7 trillion three decades later; India's increased from under \$300 billion to nearly \$2 trillion over that same period."
9. Provocative statements always make for fun reading. "America's lack of fiscal discipline has contributed far more to its loss of power and influence than have these wars."
10. An interesting look at the rest of the world. From rising powers and the challenges that they face. "The so-called great powers are not all that great. China has already been discussed, as has Europe. Both have

significant vulnerabilities and weaknesses along with their strengths.”

11. Excellent statements that capture the essence of what is going on in the world. “The major powers share a common predicament: their inability to agree on how the world is to be organized and operated.”

12. Touches on some global hot-button issues like climate change. “In the case of climate change, there is near-universal acceptance among the world’s governments of the scientific evidence that burning fossil fuels is causing measurable change in the earth’s climate, something that in turn will affect not just average temperatures but agricultural output, species survival, insect and disease prevalence, severity and frequency of tornadoes and hurricanes, and flooding in coastal areas.”

13. Despite focusing on the challenges we face as a nation and leader of the globe provides reasons for optimism. “The twentieth century was defined by two world wars and a cold war that mercifully stayed that way; the twenty-first century is starting out and promises to remain for some time something qualitatively different.”

14. Provides an excellent list of major concerns for worry. “US interests in the Middle East are greater than American influence there. That, in a nutshell, is the current predicament of the United States.”

15. The second part of the book focuses on what the United States should and should not do abroad. “As we are seeing in the Middle East, it is one thing to oust authoritarian regimes, something very different and more difficult to replace them with something demonstrably and enduringly better.”

16. Tackles the always hot topic of dealing with terrorism. Provides different methods on how to address and the challenges involved.

17. The four contenders for foreign policy doctrine. Explains the Restoration approach.

18. Addresses the most important topics on how to put America’s house in order. “To speak of the domestic challenge facing the United States is, in reality, to speak of multiple challenges. The list is virtually endless and no doubt highly subjective, but I would highlight five core elements: reducing the federal deficit and the ratio of national debt to GDP, putting into place a comprehensive energy strategy, improving the quality of education, upgrading the country’s physical infrastructure, and modernizing an out-of-date immigration policy.”

19. A sound conclusion that brings it all together. “This book is premised on the idea that the world needs American leadership, but that American leadership requires the United States to first put its house in order, something that in turn will require its being more restrained in what it tries to do abroad and more disciplined in what it does at home.”

20. Notes provided.

Negatives:

1. Don’t expect an in-depth analysis. Haass provide the goods in a direct and straight-forward manner.
2. No supplementary material. That is, no graphs, charts, or other kinds of visual material.
3. No formal bibliography.

In summary, I was pleasantly surprised at how much I enjoyed this book. For full disclosure, considering my politics is of the progressive ilk I was expecting some conflict of opinion with Haass but that never materialized and I must say I found his book to be reasonable. It’s a treat to read a book that cuts to the chase while providing the public the necessary essentials. It’s accessible, even-handed and has a good flow to it. It’s the perfect book to suggest to anyone who normally doesn’t have much patience or interest in politics but just wants to gain a basic understanding of foreign policy without a large investment of time. I highly recommend it!

Further recommendations: “War of Necessity, War of Choice” by the same author, “Restraint” by Barry R. Posen, “Duty” by Robert M. Gates, “Hard Choices” by Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Cyber War” by Richard A. Clarke, “That Used to be Us” by Thomas L. Friedman, and “On China” by Henry Kissinger.

David Cooke says

The first third of this book is an excellent primer in foreign policy. It discusses clearly the general state of play and how we arrived at this point. The second third, unfortunately, does rehash a lot of the same ideas of the first-third, but it does so in a prescriptive, forward-looking manner, so it's still of interest. And he discusses the very thesis of the book, which is that the times have changed, and we need to rethink our foreign policy strategy, scaling it back, focusing more on Asia and less on the Middle East, and also turning our resources a bit more toward domestic development. This is a strategy I can generally get behind. However, the domestic third is downright terrible.

The big issue with the book is that Haass wrote a book he is ill-prepared for. The domestic stuff is essentially a rehashing of generic inside-the-beltway froo-froo. His worship of Simpson-Bowles is ill-founded, and it reminds me of David Brooks-style moderation, which is to take a little bit from one side and a little bit of the other, regardless of whether it is consistent or good policy. He makes assertions about the debt and deficit with absolutely zero factual basis. And it is all garbage platitudes you've heard before. It is literally worthless.

The only other major issue I found with the book was that the foreign policy discussion completely takes for granted at numerous points the assertion that a primary desire for the United States is the protection of Israel. Given the way in which he dissects our other interests, his lack of analysis on this point are a serious shortfall.

Overall, the foreign policy discussion was interesting and enjoyable, but I think a book where he focused solely on this area would be a much better read - he is clearly out of his element in this one.

John says

This is not that great of a book. The author should stick with foreign affairs, which is clearly his strength. I really enjoyed the first 60% or so of this book, which laid out many foreign policy challenges past, present, and future. It's clear Haas knows his history and politics around the world. Domestic politics, however, are not his strong suit.

Let me just say that I agree with his overall premise- if the US takes care of business at home, many foreign policy challenges would become easier in the abstract. However, he mentions several major issues that are more complex than he gives credit to. He briefly introduces topics like education and immigration, and gives about 5-10 pages each to his quick and easy solutions to fix everything. Along the way he makes great generalizations and vague predictions... "this COULD lead to that, or that SHOULD cause this". It's not his best work for sure

John Daly says

Book 13 of 40 in the 2015 Book Challenge

I'm a fan of Morning Joe and I've often often agreed with Richard Hass when he is part of the panel.

This book is an expanded outline of his opinions on the state of American foreign policy.

A strong believer in a strong American presence in the world he makes clear that there is a need for us to improve at home in order to sustain our presence as a world power.

He points out that we need to make strong policy improvements in education, immigration, infrastructure, energy, and our deficit and debt.

But to make these reforms we will also need to improve our politics. Our system he argues and I strongly agree has become too polarized and has forgotten that the American system only works when there is compromise. I believe Henry Clay thought as that.

Overall if your a Morning Joe fan and want to read deeper into some of Hass' thinking this is a nice quick read about where we should be looking to go with our policy both foreign and domestic.

Sean says

Though I disagree with some of the minor points, the overarching message of the book urgently needs to enter popular discourse. Haass' recommendations of thoughtful restraint abroad is sound, as is his emphasis on reform at home. My biggest complaint with the book is its sometimes overwhelming vagueness about how the author's ideal policy would differentiate from those of the past few decades. Still, weighing in at a little less than 200 pages, the book is clearly intended to be more easily accessible. A more comprehensive companion volume would more useful for those interested in the particulars.

Clint Johnson says

Foreign policy chapters are deconstructed well and are a good primer on the subject, especially from a pro-retrenchment view point. Those sections have also aged decently well despite the number of world events that have happened since this was published. The domestic policy sections are not as well fleshed out and lack a lot of specifics. Deficit spending shifted slightly between FY 2014-18 after this was published which is relevant to some of the domestic proposals.

Notably missing was a discussion around climate change effects as it relates to national security and subsequent potential for migration crises in Latin America and Africa.

Ben Jasinski says

I thought this was a great book, and it gives some really interesting ideas on what is to come for the United States in the ever increasing globalized world. I though the ideas proposed for America and how it can still take a leading roll in the world (basically not losing its global dominance) but refocus on needed areas like latin america and asia are going to be vital to this country in the future. I do how ever disagree with the author on some of the ideas proposed about domestic issues. Number one is his call for the dissolving of the

electoral college. this would lead candidates to forgot vast swaths of this country and solely campaign in areas like New York and LA where if you could win those metropolitan areas you can basically win the popular vote. besides that it was a great read.

Christopher Stephens says

I am a big fan of Richard Haass and he has excellent insights on the problems facing America and how to start to turn around and move in the right direction. He also gives great examples of how interfering in foreign affairs, diving in when the situation is not understood at all in Washington, has brought America into many of the rough spots we find ourselves in today. Of course no one man could be expected to have all the solutions, but Haass offers a lot of great advice. Very interesting read, for American or otherwise.

William says

Good summary of inside Washington thinking on foreign policy options. When he turns to the domestic front, becomes more predictably standard issue moderate conservative. The one item not dealt with, one of rising significance is that of the growing distance between rich and poor in the US. Going forward, it is difficult to see how this issue does not affect and constrain US domestic politics as well as the nation's foreign policy.

Brian says

While there were quite a few good points made, many of which I support. Like getting addressing entitlement programs, investing in our infrastructure, and dealing with the deficit. However, I did think it was a little thin on policy recommendations to really address these problems. It's a good start to begin thinking about these important issues and their relationship to foreign policy. It just needed more!

A says

Provides interesting insight

Brady Clemens says

I really had higher hopes for this book. I think that his analysis of the current foreign policy situation as well as what we should consider basing our foreign policy on is quite sound. And the factors he identifies as problems at home are important. But his strength is definitely on the foreign policy aspects; when it comes to discussing domestic issues that affect foreign policy Haass is seemingly out of his depth. His opinions on debt and solutions for American educational problems are poorly-considered, and his overall hawkishness on the national debt reflects the overblown hysteria of the same deficit scolds who saw no problem with mounting deficits and national debt under the previous Administration. Still, though, his overall argument is

sound, and my criticisms are quibbles about details of his argument rather than the main thrust.

Matt Connolly says

It's one thing to discuss a new, comprehensive grand strategy ("Restoration") and quite another to prescribe specific policies that need to be implemented. Haass understands the issues facing a Post-Post Cold War world, but because they are so complicated he has had a hard time discussing how to tackle them. Besides, the issues are fairly predictable so it's really nothing new. Maybe a good first-book in a foreign policy course, but not nearly as enlightening as I had hoped. 2 stars.

Joe Carpenter says

Written from a much more optimistic place than his latest book (which in many ways was a rehashing of this one, using many of the same examples, source materials, and phrasings). The first half of the book focuses on historical US foreign policy toward specific regions, focusing mostly on the middle east I think owing to the fact that Richard Haass was in the white house during the Iraq war as an adviser.

The second half of the book goes through the weaknesses the US has internally and what can be done about them. The solutions he provides are not detailed, but they aren't overly optimistic either. He is a centrist, he wants realistic solutions that invest into the future rather than the current trend of chasing immediate gains.

I enjoyed this book more than his latest "A World in Disarray". This book focused on foreign policy in a novel way. And it outlines the threats we could impose on ourselves by not getting our own financial house in order.

I would not call this a "must read" but, it's a short interesting read for someone interested in US foreign policy and the current state of things globally(which it does well, even if it is a few years out of date).
