



Passing the BATON

*Foreign Policy Challenges and
Opportunities Facing the New Administration*

Introduction

Passing the Baton 2009 was a one-day conference convened by the United States Institute of Peace to examine critical foreign policy challenges and opportunities facing the Obama administration as it transitions into power. It took place January 8, 2009 at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C.

A high-level, bipartisan group of current and former U.S. foreign policy officials, scholars, and other experts made presentations to nearly 1900 participants. The discussed specific options or recommendations for the Obama administration on such important international topics as the Arab-Israeli peace process, the way forward in Afghanistan, and countering nuclear proliferation.

Passing the Baton 2009 was a reprise of an event by the same name that USIP sponsored in January 2001 as the country made the transition from the Clinton to the Bush administration. Today, our country is in another leadership transition, but in significantly changed – and evermore challenging – international and domestic circumstances.

In 2001 the United States saw itself as part of a “post-Cold War” world, struggling to relate to post-Soviet Union Russia, trying to stabilize the Balkans, and considering how to reorganize America’s national security management in a world moving beyond the era of superpower confrontation.

Within nine months of the Bush administration taking office, however, September 11th transformed for Americans, and for the world, their conception of international challenges. Our national security and foreign policy agenda was dramatically altered, producing a paradigm shift in the issues and approaches to protecting America’s security and promoting our interests abroad.

Today the United States finds itself in a post-9/11 world rather than a post-Cold War world. Our country has spent the last eight years dealing with catastrophic terrorism perpetrated by non-state organizations, trying to prevent mass atrocities in weak and failed states, and confronting the heightened challenge of countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the failure of peace processes, and the burdens of stabilizing and reconstructing societies torn by war, ethnic conflict and religious extremism.

Passing the Baton 2009 was an occasion to highlight these challenges in a world much changed since 2001. On the one hand, the Middle East is again engulfed with the violence of that seemingly endless, intractable conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. Enduring hatreds are now amplified by new technologies of destruction and the intervention of regional powers and their surrogates opposed to peacemaking. On the other hand, the president-elect has a unique opportunity to restore American leadership abroad on issues ranging from the threat of nuclear proliferation to the effects of global climate change.



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Passing the Baton's presentations and panels were organized around major issues in the new national security and foreign policy agenda. This event was not a comprehensive survey, but rather one that drew on projects central to the work of the U.S. Institute of Peace, which celebrates in 2009 25 years of work on international conflict management and peacebuilding. With its broad and flexible charter from Congress, the Institute focuses on issues of war and peace, on approaches to managing international conflict by non-violent means, and on ways of strengthening our national capacity to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts abroad.

This report serves as a brief overview of the day's events and, importantly, the specific policy recommendations made by panelists. On the following pages, readers will find a short synopsis of each panel and plenary presentation from the day's events. A more comprehensive record of the event is available at USIP's website, www.usip.org, where users can access more than 14 hours of video and audio files from the conference, as well as links to supplementary documents, photo galleries, and other features. The panel descriptions in this report are intended to serve as overviews only. The video and audio files available online should be considered the official record of all speakers' remarks.

It is the Institute's hope that by providing these analyses of the international challenges facing the Obama administration as it begins its tenure, we will help policymakers and citizens alike understand the depth and complexity of the foreign policy issues the country faces. The Institute does so not in an effort to overwhelm its audience with the scale of the effort needed, but to highlight policy alternatives facing the country. It is the Institute's purpose to find nonviolent solutions to managing or resolving international conflicts. Hopefully, conflicts can be prevented from reaching a violent stage, but if not, there are techniques of managing crises and promoting post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction. That is the fundamental purpose of the work of the United States Institute of Peace and the focus of Passing the Baton 2009.