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Enemies Into Friends

How the United States Can Court Its Adversaries

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How the United States Can Court Its Adversaries

Charles A. Kupchan

IN HIS inaugural address, U.S. President Barack Obama informed those regimes “on the wrong side of history” that the United States “will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.” He soon backed up his words with deeds, making engagement with U.S. adversaries one of the new administration’s priorities. During his first year in office, Obama pursued direct negotiations with Iran and North Korea over their nuclear programs. He sought to “reset” relations with Russia by searching for common ground on arms control, missile defense, and Afghanistan. He began scaling back economic sanctions against Cuba. And he put out diplomatic feelers to Myanmar (also called Burma) and Syria.

Over a year into Obama’s presidency, the jury is still out on whether this strategy of engagement is bearing fruit. Policymakers and scholars are divided over the merits and the risks of Obama’s outreach to adversaries and over how best to increase the likelihood that his overtures will be reciprocated. Debate continues on whether rapprochement results from mutual concessions that tame rivalries or rather from the iron fist that forces adversaries into submission. Equally controversial is whether the United States should pursue reconciliation with hardened autocracies or instead make engagement

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contingent on democratization. And disagreement persists over whether diplomacy or economic engagement represents the most effective pathway to peace.

Many of Obama's critics have already made up their minds on the merits of his outreach to adversaries, concluding not only that the president has little to show for his efforts but also that his pliant diplomacy demeans the United States and weakens its hand. Following Obama's September 2009 speech to the United Nations General Assembly, in which he called for "a new era of engagement based on mutual interest and mutual respect" and "new coalitions that bridge old divides," the conservative commentator Michelle Malkin charged that the president had "solidified his place in the international view as the great appeaser and the groveler in chief."

The historical record, however, makes clear that such skepticism is misplaced and that Obama is on the right track in reaching out to adversaries. Long-standing rivalries tend to thaw as a result of mutual accommodation, not coercive intimidation. Of course, offers of reconciliation are sometimes rebuffed, requiring that they be revoked. But under the appropriate conditions, reciprocal concessions are bold and courageous investments in peace. Obama is also right to ease off on democracy promotion as he engages adversaries; even states that are repressive at home can be cooperative abroad. Moreover, contrary to conventional wisdom, diplomacy, not trade, is the currency of peace; economic interdependence is a consequence more than a cause of rapprochement.

If tentative engagement with U.S. adversaries is to grow into lasting rapprochement, Obama will need to secure from them not just concessions on isolated issues but also their willingness to pursue sustained cooperation. Doing so will require Washington to make its own compromises without dangerously dropping its guard. Obama must also manage the domestic political perils that will inevitably accompany such diplomacy. Not only will he have to weather Republican complaints about his "apology tours" abroad, but Obama will need to make sure that Congress is ready to support any deals that result from his diplomatic efforts. Should foreign governments take up Washington's offers of cooperation, they, too, will face dangers at home. In fact, Obama is in the difficult position of seeking peace

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with regimes whose viability may well be undermined if they reciprocate the United States' overtures. Washington is off to a good start in seeking to turn enemies into friends, but the task at hand requires exceptional diplomacy both abroad and at home.

DIPLOMATIC COURTSHIP

SOME OF the recalcitrant regimes Obama is seeking to engage will surely refuse to reciprocate. With such states, Washington, after a decent interval, should suspend the offer of accommodation in favor of a strategy of isolation and containment. But other regimes are likely to take up the offer. Thus far, Russia, Iran, North Korea, Cuba, and Myanmar have all demonstrated at least a modicum of interest in engagement with the United States. Russia has worked with the United States on arms control, stepped up its effort to contain Iran's nuclear program, and expanded access to Russian territory and airspace for military supplies headed to Afghanistan. Enveloped in domestic turmoil since its June 2009 election, Iran has taken an on-again, if mostly off-again approach to negotiations with the United States. It is clearly tempted by the offer to compromise on the scope of its nuclear program as a means of avoiding—or at least delaying—a confrontation with the West. North Korea has been similarly tentative in engaging with Washington over its nuclear program. Meanwhile, Cuba has been expanding its diplomatic dialogue with the United States, and last fall Myanmar welcomed a visit from a high-ranking U.S. diplomat and allowed him to meet with the opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

These glimmers of progress notwithstanding, critics insist that trying to make deals with extremists is appeasement by another name. Drawing on British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's infamous capitulation to Hitler at Munich in 1938, opponents of engagement claim that it will invite only intransigence and belligerence. As U.S. President George W. Bush told the Knesset in 2008, negotiating with radicals is simply "the false comfort of appeasement, which has been repeatedly discredited by history." Bush was certainly correct that accommodation had no place in dealing with a Nazi regime bent on conquest and genocide, but Chamberlain's fateful blunder should not tar all offers of accommodation as naive bouts of appeasement.

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On the contrary, the historical record reveals that the initial accommodation of an adversary, far from being an invitation to aggression, is an essential start to rapprochement. Such opening bids are usually the product of necessity rather than altruism: facing strategic overcommitment, a state seeks to reduce its burdens by befriending an adversary. If the target country responds in kind, an exchange of concessions can follow, often setting the stage for the rivalry and mutual suspicion to abate. In the final stage of rapprochement, top decision-makers bring around bureaucracies, legislative bodies, private interest groups, and ordinary citizens through lobbying and public outreach. Broader societal engagement is needed to ensure that rapprochement does not unravel when the leaders that brought it about leave office.

When it is handled correctly, engagement is not appeasement; it is sound diplomacy.

To be sure, offers of accommodation may need to be balanced with threats of confrontation. Nonetheless, the historical record confirms that accommodation, not confrontation, is usually the essential ingredient of successful rapprochement. The United States and Great Britain were antagonists for decades; after the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, their geopolitical rivalry continued until the end of the nineteenth century. The turning point came during the 1890s, when the United Kingdom's imperial commitments began to outstrip its resources. London made the opening move in 1896, acceding to Washington's blustery demand that it submit to arbitration a dispute over the border between Venezuela and British Guiana—an issue the United States deemed within its sphere of influence. The United States responded in kind to London's gesture, agreeing to bring to arbitration a disagreement over sealing rights in the Bering Sea. Soon thereafter, the two countries amicably settled disputes over the construction of the Panama Canal and the border between Alaska and Canada. The United Kingdom was the only European power to support the United States in the 1898 Spanish-American War, and it went on to welcome U.S. expansion into the Pacific.

As diplomacy dampened the rivalry, elites on both sides of the Atlantic sought to recast popular attitudes through ambitious public relations campaigns. Arthur Balfour, leader of the House of Commons,

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proclaimed in 1896 that “the idea of war with the United States of America carries with it something of the unnatural horror of a civil war.” In a speech at Harvard in 1898, Richard Olney, U.S. secretary of state from 1895 to 1897, referred to the United Kingdom as the United States’ “best friend” and noted “the close community . . . in the kind and degree of the civilization enjoyed by both [countries].” With the help of lobbying groups such as the Anglo-American Committee, these changes in the public discourse ensured that by the early 1900s the United Kingdom had succeeded in befriending the United States. In 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt informed London, “You need not ever be troubled by the nightmare of a possible contest between the two great English-speaking peoples. I believe that is practically impossible now, and that it will grow entirely so as the years go by.”

HOW PEACE BREAKS OUT

OTHER INSTANCES of rapprochement followed a similar trajectory—as was the case with rapprochement between Norway and Sweden. As part of the territorial settlement at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, Denmark ceded control over Norway to Sweden in 1814. The Swedes promptly invaded Norway to put down a revolt against their rule, and the resulting union between Norway and Sweden that formed in 1815 led to decades of Norwegian estrangement from the Swedish. Rivalry between the two parties began to abate in 1905, when Sweden, confronted with resource constraints and pressure from Europe’s great powers, accepted Norway’s unilateral secession from the union. Norway reciprocated by dismantling its border defenses, and the two countries proceeded to resolve their outstanding territorial disputes. Their cooperation during World War I consolidated rapprochement, setting the stage for the eventual consolidation of peace throughout Scandinavia after World War II.

Peace came to Southeast Asia in a comparable fashion. A militarized rivalry between Indonesia and Malaysia began in 1963, when Jakarta opposed the formation of Malaysia—a federation among Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak, and Singapore. In 1966, General Suharto took power in Indonesia and proceeded to back away from confrontation with Malaysia, primarily to redress the deteriorating economic conditions

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brought on by Jakarta's refusal to trade with Malaysia and by the international sanctions imposed in response to Indonesian belligerence. The two countries then exchanged concessions on a number of issues and teamed up with their neighbors to form the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 1967, which has helped preserve peace in Southeast Asia ever since.

Rapprochement between Argentina and Brazil followed a similar pattern. After decades of rivalry that had begun in the colonial era, mutual accommodation started to clear the way for reconciliation in the late 1970s. Argentina faced the prospect of a war with Chile and needed to reduce its other strategic commitments, and Brazil's more moderate leaders viewed rapprochement with Argentina as a way of undercutting the growing power of hard-liners in Brazil's security and intelligence apparatus. Argentina made the opening move in 1979 by finally reaching an accord with Brazil and Paraguay on the construction of a hydroelectric dam across the Paraná River, which flows through the three countries. During the 1980s, Argentina and Brazil exchanged concessions, cooperated on their nuclear programs, and deepened their political, scientific, and cultural ties. In 1991, they launched a regional trade pact—Mercosur—and soon thereafter engaged in joint military exercises, which brought Brazilian troops to Argentine territory for the first time since the 1860s.

As these and many other episodes of rapprochement make clear, Obama is on firm ground in seeking to resolve long-standing rivalries through engagement rather than confrontation. This strategy is all the more attractive at a time when the United States is overstretched by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and by economic distress at home. Obama's outreach certainly entails risks and comes with no guarantee of success. But U.S. President Richard Nixon had no guarantee of a breakthrough when he went to Beijing in 1972, nor did Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat when he went to Jerusalem in 1977. Even George W. Bush, who initially forswore dialogue with members of the "axis of evil," was by the end of his second term negotiating with North Korea, sending U.S. envoys to meet Iranian officials, and allowing U.S. forces to cooperate with the Sunni insurgents in Iraq who had spent the preceding years trying to kill Americans. When it is handled correctly, engagement is not appeasement; it is sound diplomacy.

GETTING RAPPROCHEMENT RIGHT

As OBAMA pursues rapprochement with a host of different rivals, he faces two main challenges: how to handle the sequence and substance of the negotiations and how to manage the political fallout at home and abroad. As for sequence and substance, Washington should be prepared to exchange concessions that are timely and bold enough to send signals of benign intent; otherwise, each party will be unconvinced that the other is sincere in its quest for reconciliation. At the same time, Washington should not move too quickly or too boldly: overshooting could make the United States and its potential partners strategically vulnerable, intensify domestic opposition, and prompt both parties to retreat to safer ground.

History also provides useful guidance on these matters. Anglo-American rapprochement started slowly, with the United Kingdom and the United States first focusing on second-order issues: borders in Central America and sealing rights in the Bering Sea. Only after testing the waters were London and Washington ready to strike bolder bargains—over borders in North America, the building of the Panama Canal, and U.S. expansion into the Pacific. The exchange of concessions began in 1896, but it was not until 1906 that the last units of British regulars left Canada. Similarly, Norway and Sweden dropped their guards only gradually. Rapprochement began in 1905, but in 1907, still wary of the potential for Swedish aggression, Norway concluded a treaty with France, Germany, Russia, and the United Kingdom to guarantee its territorial integrity. Not until World War I did the residual suspicions abate. In August 1914, Norway and Sweden issued a joint declaration of neutrality. After that, a memorial stone to King Oscar I, the king of Norway and Sweden in the mid-nineteenth century, was placed on the Norwegian-Swedish border. The inscription quotes the monarch: “Hereafter is war between the Scandinavian brothers impossible.”

In contrast, attempts at rapprochement have foundered when they have gone too far too fast. China and the Soviet Union fashioned a remarkably close strategic partnership during the 1950s, but it unraveled at the end of the decade in part because Beijing suddenly found itself exposed by its heavy reliance on Soviet advisers and

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economic assistance. In 1958, when Moscow proposed a joint submarine force and a joint naval communications headquarters, Mao Zedong told Russia's ambassador to China, "Well, if [you] want joint ownership and operation [of the submarines], how about having them all—let us turn into joint ownership and operation our army, navy, air force, industry, agriculture, culture, education. . . . With a few atomic bombs, you think you are in a position to control us." The same dynamic scuttled a partnership between Egypt and Syria. After a long history of rivalry, the two countries formed the United Arab Republic in 1958, but it collapsed in 1961 when Syria rebelled against Egyptian dominance within the union. Syrian officers carried out a coup against the Cairo-controlled government in Damascus and proceeded to secede from the United Arab Republic on the grounds that Egypt had "humiliated Syria and degraded her army."

Such historical examples offer at best a loose comparison with the rivalries Washington currently hopes to tame. Nonetheless, they suggest that the Obama administration should pursue rapprochement incrementally and carefully sequence its concessions, strictly conditioning each more ambitious step on reciprocity. Through this strategy, mutual antagonism can gradually give way to mutual accommodation without the risk of exploitation: each side lets down its guard only in step with the other.

So far, the Obama administration's handling of relations with Russia has followed just such an approach. Washington has backed up its call for resetting relations with Moscow by pursuing nuclear arms control, addressing Russian concerns about U.S. missile defense, and establishing bilateral working groups on a range of issues. The Kremlin has reciprocated, enabling progress in negotiations on arms reductions, diplomacy toward Iran, and access to Afghanistan. Should the momentum behind rapprochement continue to build, the stage may be set for tackling more difficult issues, such as NATO enlargement, the independence of Kosovo, the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and Russia's place in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture.

Obama's outreach to Cuba has been even more incremental. Washington made the opening move by loosening some sanctions and tentatively expanding diplomatic and cultural engagement. Cuba has undertaken only modest economic reforms, and Obama has

conditioned a wider opening on Havana's readiness to advance political and economic liberalization. Similarly, Washington cautiously reached out to Myanmar through a high-level dialogue but is now awaiting clearer signs that its generals are prepared to loosen their grip on power before pursuing deeper engagement.

Iran and North Korea, because of their nuclear programs, are particularly tough cases. Washington is justifiably intent on neutralizing the nuclear threats they pose. But both countries appear unwilling to give up their nuclear programs, which they deem necessary to maintain their

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security and bargaining leverage. The tightening of sanctions could help change the political calculus in Tehran and Pyongyang. Nonetheless, the logic of incrementalism would suggest that Washington should also pursue negotiations on a set of broader issues to help build the levels of mutual confidence needed to tackle the nuclear question. With Tehran, the United States could seek cooperation on Afghanistan,

particularly on curbing the drug trade there, which flows into Iran. Washington could also discuss with Tehran the potential for a new security architecture in the Persian Gulf, which is of particular importance as U.S. forces prepare to exit Iraq. With Pyongyang, a dialogue on economic assistance, energy supplies, and the normalization of relations may help clear the way for a deal on North Korea's nuclear program.

It was precisely this kind of step-by-step approach that allowed Argentina and Brazil to reach a final accord on their nuclear programs in 1985, after several years of building confidence through presidential visits, scientific exchanges, and technical accords. The nuclear agreement, which committed both countries to the renunciation of nuclear weapons and provided each unfettered access to the other's nuclear sites, then served as a breakthrough, clearing the way for lasting rapprochement. In a similar fashion, Tehran and Pyongyang may not agree to constraints on their nuclear programs and rigorous international monitoring until engagement with Washington has begun to dampen the mutual antagonism. A deal on the nuclear issue may well need to be part of a broader strategic realignment with the United States, not a precondition for that realignment.

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THE HOSTILE HOME FRONT

OBAMA'S SECOND main challenge is to manage the domestic backlash that regularly accompanies the accommodation of adversaries—one of the key stumbling blocks in past efforts at rapprochement. Anglo-American rapprochement in the nineteenth century on several occasions almost foundered on the shoals of domestic opposition. The U.S. Senate, for example, rejected a general arbitration treaty with the United Kingdom in 1897. Meanwhile, the British government, fearful of a nationalist revolt against its accommodating stance toward Washington, hid from the public its readiness to cede naval superiority in the western Atlantic to the United States. General Suharto, well aware that accommodation with Malaysia risked provoking Indonesian hard-liners, moved slowly and cautiously—as did General Ernesto Geisel when Brazil opened up to Argentina. As the Nixon administration discovered in the 1970s, these governments were wise to be cautious. Détente between the United States and the Soviet Union stalled in part because the White House failed to lay the groundwork for it at home and ran up against congressional resistance. In 1974, for example, Congress passed the Jackson-Vanik amendment, which imposed trade restrictions in order to pressure the Soviet Union to allow emigration.

Like past leaders who advocated accommodation, Obama faces formidable domestic opposition. When he pledged to pursue engagement with the Iranian government even after its troubled election last year, the *Washington Post* columnist Charles Krauthammer criticized Obama's policy of "dialogue with a regime that is breaking heads, shooting demonstrators, expelling journalists, arresting activists." "This," he wrote, "from a president who fancies himself the restorer of America's moral standing in the world." After the Obama administration revised its predecessor's missile defense program, John Boehner (R-Ohio), the House minority leader, claimed that "scrapping the U.S. missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic does little more than empower Russia and Iran at the expense of our allies in Europe."

An even bigger challenge than parrying these rhetorical blows will be ensuring that the concrete bargains struck in the service of rapprochement pass muster with Congress. If the United States is to

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ratify a deal on nuclear weapons reductions with Moscow and embrace the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, two-thirds of the Senate will have to approve. Even without a single defection from the Democratic caucus, the White House will need a healthy measure of support from the Republican Party, which has moved considerably to the right since it last shot down the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, in 1999. Scaling back sanctions against Cuba, Iran, or Syria would similarly require congressional action, which also would not come easily; Congress would no doubt balk at the prospect of ending the isolation of Havana, Tehran, or Damascus. Jackson-Vanik, after all, is still on the books, even though the Soviet Union is no more and Russia ended its restrictive emigration policies long ago. In the face of such congressional hurdles, Obama should develop a legislative strategy that supports his diplomacy sooner rather than later.

To complicate matters further, Obama has to worry about domestic obstacles to rapprochement in other countries as well. From Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Russian leaders Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin to Cuban President Raúl Castro, Obama's negotiating partners as a matter of course play the anti-American card to bolster their rule. Even if they want to compromise with the United States, they might find themselves hemmed in by the popular resentment of Washington that they have already stirred up. Obama can lend a hand by using public diplomacy to lessen popular animosity toward the United States. His superb oratorical skills are an important asset: his frequent efforts at public outreach—such as his speeches in Ankara, Cairo, and Moscow and his video greeting to the Iranians on their New Year—may well help give foreign leaders the room they need to reciprocate U.S. overtures. Far from showboating or squandering his presidential prestige, Obama is wisely deploying his popularity in the service of peace.

MYTH BUSTING

BUILDING CONGRESSIONAL support for Obama's outreach to adversaries will mean debunking three myths that often distort public debate about strategies of engagement. The first is the presumption that Washington compromises its values and power by seeking

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rapprochement with autocratic regimes. U.S. officials and opinion-makers on both sides of the aisle share a commitment to democratization for both principled reasons (democracies respect the rights of their citizens) and pragmatic ones (democracies are peaceful and cooperative, whereas autocracies are presumably belligerent and unreliable partners). Accordingly, even if the United States succeeded in striking a deal with the Iranian, the Russian, or the Syrian government, critics would charge that Washington's behavior was morally tainted (for rewarding and strengthening autocrats) and naive (because such governments cannot be trusted to keep their commitments).

But Obama is fully justified in putting the democratization agenda on the back burner and basing U.S. diplomacy toward other states on their external behavior, not their regime type. Even repressive regimes can be reliably cooperative when it comes to their conduct of foreign policy. Argentina and Brazil embarked on the path of rapprochement when they were both ruled by military juntas. Suharto oversaw a campaign of brutal repression at home but nonetheless ended Indonesia's belligerent stance toward Malaysia and helped found the Association of Southeast Asian Nations as a pact to preserve regional peace.

Striking bargains with repressive regimes does require making moral compromises. Doing so is justified, however, by the concrete contributions to international stability that can result. Washington should speak out against violations of human rights and support political liberalization around the world. But when nuclear weapons, terrorism, and matters of war and peace are on the line, responsible statecraft requires pragmatic compromise, not ideological intransigence.

A second misconception, often affirmed by opponents of engagement, is that pursuing rapprochement with an adversary means abandoning hope that its government will change. On the contrary, doing business with autocracies has the potential to bring about regime change through the backdoor by weakening hard-liners and empowering reformers. Engagement with Iran, for example, could

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undermine a government that relies on confrontation with the United States to rally popular support and disarm the opposition.

Belligerent governments have frequently been the victims of rapprochement. Sweden's aristocracy and military lost power to the country's liberals as rapprochement with Norway advanced. Military juntas governed Argentina and Brazil when their reconciliation began in 1979; by 1985, both countries were democracies. In none of these cases was rapprochement the only factor that helped bring about regime change, but the more benign strategic environment that accompanied reconciliation certainly strengthened the hand of reformers.

Should Obama's outreach succeed in winning over adversaries, the anti-American pedigree of such leaders as Ahmadinejad, Castro, and Putin may well do more to compromise their credibility than to enhance their popularity. Over the long run, working with recalcitrant autocrats may undermine them far more effectively than containment and confrontation.

DIPLOMACY BEFORE DOLLARS

A FINAL MISCONCEPTION is that economic interdependence is usually a precursor to rapprochement. Proponents of a "commercial peace" contend that trade and investment encourage amity between rivals by bringing their economic and political interests into alignment. By trading with China, Cuba, and other autocracies, the United States can pursue joint gains and advance political liberalization, which will in turn promote peaceful relations. Supporters of this view call for economic integration not only between the United States and its rivals but also between China and Japan, the Israelis and the Palestinians, and Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Muslims.

Rapprochement, however, is the product of diplomacy, not commerce. Although commercial integration can help deepen reconciliation, primarily by enlisting the support of industrialists and financiers, the diplomats must first lay the political foundation. Anglo-American trade declined in relative terms between 1895 and 1906, the critical decade of rapprochement. Big business on both sides of the Atlantic did help improve relations, but only after the key diplomatic break-

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throughs that occurred between 1896 and 1898. Argentina and Brazil enjoyed minimal bilateral commerce during the 1980s—their era of reconciliation. Only after the founding of Mercosur in 1991 did commercial integration take off.

Moreover, strong commercial ties by no means guarantee comity. By 1959, after a decade of economic integration, 50 percent of China's exports were going to the Soviet Union, and China had become the Soviet Union's top trading partner. But this extraordinary level of commercial interdependence did nothing to prevent the return of geopolitical rivalry after the break between Beijing and Moscow. By 1962, bilateral commerce had dropped by 40 percent. Politics was in command.

The lesson for the Obama administration is to keep its eye on the fundamentals. Under pressure from its critics, the White House might be tempted to sidestep the core security issues at stake and seek to pursue reconciliation with adversaries primarily through economic means. But as the Sino-Soviet case illustrates, unless commercial integration is pursued within the context of a consensus on major geopolitical issues, it will be a distraction at best. To be sure, Washington can wield important leverage by loosening economic sanctions against Cuba, Iran, and Syria. The main benefit of such action, however, would be the political signal it sends, not the purportedly pacifying effects of commercial integration. Growing economic ties can help lock in rapprochement, but only after a political settlement is at hand.

DELIVERING THE GOODS

IF THE Obama administration's tentative engagement with the United States' rivals is to be more than a passing flirtation, Washington will have to conduct not only deft statecraft abroad but also particularly savvy politics at home. Progress will be slow and incremental; it takes years, if not decades, to turn enmity into amity. The problem for Obama is that patience is in extraordinarily short supply in Washington. With midterm elections looming in November, critics will surely intensify their claims that Obama's outreach has yet to pay off. In preparation, Obama should push particularly hard on a single front, aiming to have at least one clear example that his strategy is working.

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Rapprochement with Russia arguably offers the best prospects for near-term success. Washington and Moscow are well on their way toward closing a deal on arms control, and their interests intersect on a number of other important issues, including the need for stability in Central and South Asia. Moreover, the United States can piggyback on the progress that the European Union has already made in reaching out to Russia on issues of trade, energy, and security.

Obama also needs to start laying the groundwork for congressional support. To help clear the legislative hurdles ahead, Obama should consider including in his stable of special envoys a prominent Republican—such as former National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, former Senator Chuck Hagel, or former Secretary of State James Baker—to lend a bipartisan imprimatur to any proposed deals that might come before Congress. He must also be careful not to overreach. For example, his call to eliminate nuclear weapons altogether, however laudable in theory, may scare off centrist senators who might otherwise be prepared to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Obama should also be mindful of the order in which he picks his fights. If advancing rapprochement with Russia is a priority for 2010, it makes sense to put off heavy lifting with Cuba until the following year. It is better to shepherd a few key items through Congress than to ask for too much—and risk coming back empty-handed.

Despite the numerous obstacles at home and abroad, the Obama administration should stick to its strategy of engaging U.S. adversaries. Rapprochement usually takes place in fits and starts and, under the best of circumstances, requires painstaking diplomacy and persistence. But when it works, it makes the world a much safer place. That realization alone should help buy Obama at least some of the time that he will need if he is to succeed in turning enemies into friends. 🌐