

The Mind and The World

Changing the Very Idea
Of American Foreign Policy

(Edited Excerpts)

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Changing the Very Idea of Foreign Policy

This study has a grand purpose: to begin a change in American foreign policy — not just in particular existing policies, but in the very idea of what foreign policy is.

New realities have emerged since the end of the Cold War. But they have largely been ignored in American foreign policy. The Global Interdependence Initiative was designed to address those vital concerns. They are:

- ?? the environment,
- ?? human rights,
- ?? women's rights,
- ?? children's issues,
- ?? global public health and the spread of disease,
- ?? poverty and the powerlessness of the impoverished,
- ?? fair labor practices,
- ?? violent ethnic conflicts,
- ?? the rights of indigenous people to preserve their traditional ways of life, and crucially
- ?? an economics of sustainability that promotes quality of life rather than an unsustainable economic growth.

When one looks more closely, further details come into focus: the immense danger of global warming, the freedom of women to get an education and engage in public life, the connections between women's education and world population growth, AIDS in Africa, the spread of tuberculosis, the enslavement of children and child labor, and so on.

These concerns might sound to some like a laundry list of unrelated topics. As we shall see, they are anything but that. They are a natural category of concerns — a category that has never been adequately described or named. Our job is to forge a general approach to foreign policy where each item on this list is a natural special case, a natural and obvious concern for American foreign policy conceptualized in a new way.

Why Does the Mind Matter Here?

The problem is a conceptual problem, a problem of mind. Our job is to change ideas, to imagine and implement a new way of thinking. How we understand the world is all-important. Our understanding at least limits, and often determines, our possibilities for action. The US is a powerful country. Our IDEAS in the area of foreign policy shape our actions toward other countries every bit as much as do external events.

The academic discipline most relevant to understanding and changing the very nature of our ideas is cognitive science — the interdisciplinary study of mind — and especially that branch of cognitive science concerned with conceptual systems and language, namely, cognitive linguistics.

From cognitive science we learn that most of our thought is below the level of consciousness, part of what is called “the cognitive unconscious.” Even careful, well-educated planners who think deeply about what they are doing typically make use of a system of unconscious, implicit concepts that they may not be aware of. The job of cognitive linguistics is to study what those concepts are and how they change.

Cognitive linguistics has produced two major insights that are of relevance to this study:

- (1) Language is defined relative to what are called "conceptual frames" — ways of "framing" problems. Again, these are sometimes below the level of consciousness.
- (2) The major mechanism of abstract thought is conceptual metaphor. It is metaphorical thought that allows us to understand and reason with difficult and sophisticated ideas in everyday terms.

As we shall see, most if not all of our major foreign policy ideas are metaphorical. One of our tasks will be to show just what our foreign policy metaphors have been in the past and what new metaphorical ideas are needed to replace them.

If the Global Interdependence Initiative — the GII — is to be successful, we will have to construct a clear general way of conceptualizing an overall foreign policy and language to go with it, language that will effectively frame every issue.

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Self-Interest Versus Moral Norms

Moral Norms

Our basic strategy for achieving GII goals will be to construct a foreign policy based on appropriate moral norms and we will build it up a bit at a time. We will make a modest beginning at the outset. First we need to talk about what norms are, and then what it means to have a foreign policy based on international moral norms.

What Are "Norms"?

A "norm" has three aspects:

1. It is a standard, a positive value, a vitally important good that is to be aspired to and upheld.
2. Violation of the norm — of that standard of behavior — naturally triggers at least social pressure and possibly overt action to uphold the standard.
3. When social pressure and overt action are successful, the behavior becomes what is *normally* done. That is, it is usual, typical, expected behavior — a *norm*.

International Moral Norms as the Basis for Foreign Policy

In any well-functioning community, there are norms of moral behavior — things people normally do because they are the right things to do and because not doing them brings social condemnation and action by other people. Those who violate social norms are subject to community pressure to conform, and if they do not, they become social outcasts and/or become subject to punishment.

The idea of International Moral Norms is an extension of the World Community Metaphor: members of the World community are expected to obey certain norms of behavior, just as people living in a community are expected to do. As foreign policy, the idea is to stabilize and regulate the behavior of nations by the imposition of moral norms — behaviors expected of moral nations. These behaviors are maintained by peer pressure, by international civil society, by the threat of sanctions and of being treated as an outcast and, if absolutely necessary, by force — military action — as a last resort.

The use of international moral norms as a basis for foreign policy is based on the following central idea:

It is better to live in a world governed by international moral norms than by the pursuit of self-interest and the potential for conflict that comes with self-interest.

In ordinary communities, security comes not just from police power. Real security comes only when the community members follow moral norms. The US is the only superpower -- it has superior air power, enough bombs to destroy the world, and is wealthier than any other nation. But that does not make the US really secure. Its wealth and military security are threatened by the possibility of the collapse of markets elsewhere, and by events internal to other countries:

- a. "rogue nations" harboring and supporting terrorists,
- b. the sale of nuclear weapons and missiles to such nations,
- c. large flows of immigrants fleeing oppression,
- d. global warming and other dangers to the world ecology, and
- e. looking bad in the "court of world opinion" (which could effect trade and hence wealth and military treaties).

One approach to international moral norms has to do with treaties and international conventions: The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the Convention on Children's Rights, The Kyoto Accords, and so on. Treaties define what socially respectable nations — nations that act morally — don't do: They don't develop and test nuclear or biological weapons. They don't allow child slavery and indentured servitude. They don't contribute to global warming. These are among an International Ten Commandments that we will discuss later in this study. Under moral norms policy, international treaties become the mechanism for the setting of moral norms.

The second manifestation of the idea of international moral norms has to do with interventions by the world community. There are levels and kinds of violence that are simply unacceptable in a stable, morally and socially organized world community. Just as a responsible community of people must intervene when an individual gets

unacceptably violent, so a responsible world community must intervene when an individual state gets unacceptably violent. This is not just true of violence, but of other forms of state behavior as well.

Moral states:

- a. don't commit genocide or engage in ethnic cleansing
- b. don't oppress their own people
- c. don't let paramilitary groups prey on their own people
- d. don't let their people starve
- e. don't tolerate corruption on a scale massive enough to destabilize the economy.

Just as it is in the interest of an individual to live in a community where moral norms for reasonable behavior are accepted, so it is in the national interest of a state to live in such a world community. Upholding such moral norms may require regional military interventions, peacekeeping missions, and economic sanctions. It also requires that the US set an example, that it act according to the moral norms that it advocates, that it uphold its end of treaties, pay its dues (e.g., to the UN), contribute to peacekeeping forces, and so on.

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The Second Debate: A Microcosm of the Problem

The second presidential debate in the 2000 Bush-Gore election was a microcosm of the issues that this book is about. The moderator, Jim Lehrer, began with a question for candidate Bush.

MR. LEHRER: Governor Bush, the first question goes to you. One of you is about to be elected the leader of the single most powerful nation in the world, economically, financially, militarily, diplomatically, you name it. Have you formed any guiding principles for exercising this enormous power?

MR. BUSH: I have. I have. The first question is what's in the best interests of the United States. What's in the best interests of our people? When it comes to foreign policy that'll be my guiding question. Is it in our nation's interests? Peace in the Middle East is in our nation's interests. Having a hemisphere that is free for trade and peaceful is in our nation's interests. Strong relations in Europe is in our nation's interests.

Candidate Gore gave a very different answer.

MR. LEHRER: Vice President Gore.

MR. GORE: Yes, Jim, I've thought a lot about that particular question and I see our greatest natural — national strength coming from what we stand for in the world. I see it as a question of values. ...

The power of example is America's greatest power in the world. And that means, for example, standing up for human rights. It means addressing the problems of injustice and inequity along lines of race and ethnicity here at home because in all these other places around the world where they're having these terrible problems when they feel hope it is often because they see in us a reflection of their potential. So — so we've got to enforce our civil rights laws. We've got to deal with things like racial profiling. ...

... maybe I've heard the previous statements wrong, Governor. In some of the discussions we've had about when it's appropriate for the U.S. to use force around the world, at times the — the standards that you've laid down have given me the impression that if it's — if it's something like a, a genocide taking place or what they called ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, that that alone would not be — that that wouldn't be the kind of situation that would cause you to think that the U.S. ought to, to get involved with, with troops. Now, [there] have to be other factors involved for me to want to be involved. But by itself, that, to me, can bring into play a fundamental American strategic interest because I think it's based on our values.

What we see here are two fundamentally different approaches to foreign policy. Bush, now president, sees the world in terms of nations pursuing their self-interest and takes it for granted that the US should be pursuing its own self-interest. Gore painted a picture of the world in terms of moral values as constituting "strategic interest": genocide and ethnic cleansing violate a "fundamental American strategic interest." The US should be setting a moral example for the world, and US foreign policy should be directed toward upholding and extending moral norms consistent with core American values.

Neither Gore nor Lehrer was able to make a clear statement of the fundamental difference: **Should the world be governed by self-interest or by moral norms?**

Given the confusion, Bush was even able to appear as the "compassionate" conservative, appearing as if he were coming out in favor of relieving third-world debt. But in each case, he qualifies the "generosity" and frames his view, of foreign policy as self-interest, as if it were simple prudence.

MR. LEHRER: Does that give us — does our wealth, our good economy, our power bring with it special obligations to the rest of the world?

MR. BUSH: Yes it does. Take for example, third world debt. I think we ought to be forgiving third world debt under certain conditions. I think, for example, if we're convinced that a third world country that's got a lot of debt would reform itself, that the money wouldn't go into the hands of a few, but would go to help people, then I think it'd make sense for us to use our wealth in that way. Or to trade debt for valuable rain forest lands, makes eminent sense. Yes, we do have an obligation in the world, but we can't be all things to all people. We can help build

coalitions, but we can't put our troops all around the world. We can lend money, but we've got to do it wisely. We shouldn't be lending money to corrupt officials. So we've got to be guarded in our generosity.

Later, Lehrer brings up the fact that US foreign aid is lower than ever and asks about the obligations of the rich to the poor. Bush appears to accept the obligation, again citing debt-relief, characterizing it as "generosity" and self-interest as prudence. (" So I look at every place where we're investing money. I just want to make sure the return is good.")

MR. LEHRER: In the nonmilitary area of influencing events around the world, the financial and economic area, World Bank president Wolfensohn said recently, governor, that U.S. contributions to overseas development assistance is lower now, almost than it has ever been. Is that a problem for you? Do you think — what is your, what is your idea about what the United States' obligations are — I'm talking about financial assistance and that sort of thing, to other countries, to poor countries?

MR. BUSH: Well I mentioned third world debt.

MR. LEHRER: Sure.

MR. BUSH: That's a place where we can use our generosity to influence in a positive way — influence nations. I believe we ought to have foreign aid. But I don't think we ought to just have foreign aid for the sake of foreign aid. I think foreign aid needs to be used to encourage markets and reform. I think a lot of times we just spend aid and say we feel better about it and it ends up being spent the wrong way. And there are some pretty egregious examples recently; one being Russia where we had I.M.F. loans that end up in the pockets of a lot of powerful people and didn't help the — help the nation. I think the I.M.F. has got a role in the world. But I don't want to see the I.M.F. out there as a way to say to world bankers, If you make a bad loan, we'll bail you out. It needs to be available for emergency situations. I thought the president did the right thing on — with Mexico and was very strongly supportive of the administration in Mexico. But I don't think I.M.F. and our — ought to be — ought to be a stop loss for people who ought to be able to evaluate risk themselves. So I look at every place where we're investing money. I just want to make sure the return is good.

Both Gore and Lehrer allow Bush to frame his policy of self-interest as prudence.

Lehrer, a journalist, injected his own framing of foreign policy into the debate, the view of foreign policy as military intervention.

MR. LEHRER: Well, let's stay on the subject for a moment. New question related to this. There have been — I figured this out — in the last 20 years, there have

been eight major actions involving the introduction of U.S. ground, air or naval forces. Let me name them: Lebanon, Grenada, Panama, the Persian Gulf, Somalia, Bosnia, Haiti, Kosovo. If you had been president, would any of those interventions not have happened?

Lehrer then goes through a list of military interventions one by one and the candidates in most cases happen to agree, though for very different reasons. Lehrer's framing of foreign policy in terms of military intervention so obscured the fundamental differences that Governor Bush was led to remark, "it seems like we're having a great love fest tonight." And many commentators and viewers after the show got the impression that Bush and Gore weren't that far apart on foreign policy.

In answering Lehrer's question, Bush introduced his own framing of Gore's position, describing it as "nation-building" — something very far from Gore's actual moral norms view as he had stated it. Gore was unable to reject Bush's framing and restate his position clearly and coherently.

MR. BUSH: Somalia. It started off as a humanitarian mission then changed into a nation-building mission and that's where the mission went wrong. The mission was changed. And as a result, our nation paid a price, and so I don't think our troops ought to be used for what's called nation building. I think our troops ought to be used to fight and win war. I think our troops ought to be used to help overthrow a dictator when it's in our best interests. But in this case, it was a nation-building exercise. And same with Haiti. I wouldn't have supported either.

A minute or two later, Bush reiterates his reframing of Gore's position:

we can't be all things to all people in the world, Jim. And I think that's where maybe the vice president and I begin to have some differences. I am — I am worried about over-committing our military around the world. I want to be judicious in its use. You mentioned Haiti. I wouldn't have sent troops to Haiti. I didn't think it was a mission worthwhile. It was a nation-building mission. And it was not very successful. It cost us billions — a couple of billions of dollars and I'm not so sure democracy's any better off in Haiti than it was before.

Lehrer, the representative of the media, accepts Bush's framing of Gore's position as "nation-building":

MR. LEHRER: Vice President Gore, do you agree with — with the Governor's views on nation-building, the use of military, our military to — for nation-building as he described it then defined it?

Gore, unable to change the framing back to his general position, tries defending nation-building:

During the years between World War I and World War II, a great lesson was learned by our military leaders and the people of the United States. The lesson was that in the aftermath of World War I we kind of turned our backs and left them to their own devices and they brewed up a lot of trouble that quickly became World War II. And acting upon that lesson, in the aftermath of our great victory in World War II, we — we laid down the Marshall Plan, President Truman did; we got still have lots of troops in — in Europe.

And what did — what did we do in the — in the late 40's and 50's and 60's? We were nation building. And it was economic. But it was also military. And the confidence that those countries recovering from the wounds of war had by having troops there, we had — we had civil administrators come in to set up their — their ways of building their towns back.

At this point Gore had accepted Bush's reframing of his foreign policy position as "nation-building". He walked into a trap. Most people were forced to ask themselves a simple question: Who should build nations? The common sense answer seems obvious: the people in those nations, of course. Bush's reframing, once accepted, drove the logic of the debate, so that Bush could then give the apparent common sense argument against foreign policy as nation-building:

MR. BUSH: I don't think so. I think what we need to do is convince people who live in the lands they live in to build the nations. Maybe I'm missing something here. I mean we're going to have kind of a nation-building corps from America. Absolutely not. Our military is meant to fight and win war. That's what it's meant to do and when it gets overextended, morale drops.

In the debate, Bush won the framing battle, with Lehrer's active help and Gore's inability to reframe.

The Lesson

The Global Interdependence Initiative can learn a lot from the second debate. First, the media is not neutral. Rather, journalists have their own framings that they take as neutral. Journalists also fail to recognize when politicians introduce their own framings and they have few linguistic resources for pointing out when this happens. Part of the job of the GII should be to help journalists recognize both their own framings and those of others and to use appropriate language to bring opposing framings to the attention of the public.

Second, some conceptions of foreign policy are so familiar that they can be used as if they were just common sense or mere prudence, e.g., self-interest. The GII will constantly run up against such familiar conceptions of foreign policy and so must have ready rhetorical strategies that make these hidden assumptions manifest and subject to question.

Third, advocates of the GII will have to call upon a moral norms conception of foreign policy. They must have at their disposal clear and effective language and must find ways of getting that language (and the ideas that go with it) accepted in public discourse.

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Framing the Role of the US in the World

We are now in a position to ask, What is the best way to portray the US as it would operate in world affairs under the Nurturant Moral Norms Policy?. In answering this question, we will be building on the research of Axel Aubrun and Joseph Grady of Cultural Logic, Inc. (Aubrun and Grady, 2000).

In the metaphors just discussed, the US is a person in the world community. This is the most common metaphor used in foreign policy and you can assume it in virtually any discussion of foreign policy. To go further, you need to ask , What kind of a person? The answer is, A decent person. A person who follows the moral norms. And not just any kind of decent person; rather one who is wealthy and powerful.

Here a problem arises: a different kind of decent person is needed for each type of situation. Here is how you can conceptualize the US as one or another type of decent person, depending of the situation.

A Collection of American Archetypes

- ?? The Example setter: lives by moral norms and promotes them by setting an example.
- f. The Mentor: helps others achieve autonomy.
- g. The Community builder: brings diverse parties together to get things done.
- h. The Leader of the work crew: gets the job done through cooperation.
- i. The Team Player does whatever the team needs, without considering self-interest. Or he may identify his self-interests with the team's self-interest,
- j. The Team captain: a team leader by virtue of being an exceptional team player.
- k. The Caretaker: Responsible for the children; committed to their future.
- l. The Protector — of the powerless and oppressed,
- m. The Respectful person: values the diversity of others.
- n. The Honest broker: Someone known to be fair-minded, who can help in negotiating disputes.
- o. The Pragmatist who cares: Faces reality; takes care of himself; does all he reasonably can for others and for the community
- p. The Partner: shares responsibility and risk.

These roles are, of course, not mutually exclusive. A decent person can switch roles from situation to situation.

Such a decent person avoids:

- ?? Placing self-interest above other values
- ?? Harming, exploiting, or oppressing others

- ?? Promoting oppression, even indirectly
- ?? Arrogance and authoritarian behavior
- ?? Wimping out by ignoring unpleasant or difficult situations.

All of these archetypes are strong and attractive. They all have a positive value in American culture. When discussing a particular form of foreign policy, think of the US in one of these roles and think of what a decent person following nurturant moral norms should do in a given situation. Pick one of these archetypal figures as the kind of decent person required in that situation.

Take the mentor, for example. Mentors have a positive image: strong, competent, responsible, and nurturing. The job of a mentor is to help make the person he is mentoring autonomous. A mentor is also respectful of the person being mentored and does not treat him as an inferior. The mentor metaphor might be useful in characterizing how the US ought to act toward powerless, poor nations who seek its help.

Any of the very real complex GII issues should, ideally, find the US acting in all such roles. Take the issue of children's health around the world as an example.

- ?? As example setter, the US should be addressing children's health problems at home.
- q. As mentor, the US should be helping less powerful nations deal as effectively as possible with its health problems. .
- r. As community builder, the US should be organizing health professionals from around the world to address this global issue.
- s. As leader of the work crew, the US should be working cooperatively and effectively with those committed to doing the job.
- t. As team captain, the US is the ultimate team player, abandoning all ego for the benefit of the enterprise and working as hard as possible.
- u. As caretaker, the US understands that child health today means a more prosperous and peaceful world tomorrow.
- v. As protector , the responsibility of the US is to do everything it reasonably can to promote the health of the world's children.
- w. As a respectful person, the US sees the diversity of world cultures in terms of diverse means of promoting health.
- x. As honest broker, the US fairly helps to resolve honest disagreements about how the project should be carried out.
- y. As caring pragmatist , the US makes a realistic estimate of what can and cannot be achieved and puts maximum effort into doing everything possible.
- z. As partner, the US commits its full and fair share of resources and energy to the job.

These archetypes, taken together, define what the role of the US should ideally be in a world governed by moral norms.

A list like this can be made up for any GII issue. Why bother? Because the job of the GII is to change what the ideal role of the US should be in foreign policy. To do that, it must reframe foreign policy in terms of new ideals for the role of the US in the world.

The public is already sympathetic to the ideals. What must be changed is the way the elites and the media think about the ideal US role, thereby reinforcing innate public opinion and encouraging its expression. That change can only come about over time through a regular reframing, repeated over and over, by influential leaders like those supporting the GII.

Change will not happen overnight. You don't create change by winning a logical argument. You create change by slowly but surely changing the way people think, replacing old frames with new.

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Levels of Framing

The GII presents a particularly complex reframing challenge. We have already seen some of the problems: the reframing of globalization must be taken into account, attacks must be anticipated and general responses formulated in advance, and positive ways of presenting the framing must be suggested. In addition, the problem presents structural complexities of a kind that may not be obvious.

First, there are three special cases of the International Moral Norms metaphor, with three potentially different audiences. Those special cases and those audiences must be born in mind, since certain suggested reframings may be appropriate for one audience but not another.

Second, there are three levels on which reframing has to be done. The levels must be distinguished, because each requires different reframing efforts.

Here is an account of the details of the complexities of the task.

The Special Cases

The Moral Norms Metaphor is more complex than we have discussed so far. There are three special cases of it, with three different sets of actors:

4. Internationalism, which focuses on international norms as set and maintained by international law and courts, treaties, and world organizations (e.g., the UN, the Salt II Treaty, the WTO, and so on). The norms are spelled out in international agreements.
5. The US as world leader metaphor, in which the US takes the lead in setting the norms and enforces them through economic sanctions and military actions. The norms are spelled out in US legislation and foreign policy directives.
6. The International Civil Society metaphor, in which NGO advocacy groups are the actors, e.g., civil organizations like Save the Children, the Sierra Club, and so on.

The norms are implicit ethical norms that the public must recognize and that must be transmittable through the media.

Each of these defines a distinct version of the moral norms metaphor, with different realizations of the norms and different potential target audiences. You may need different framings for a UN audience, an audience of US foreign policy leaders, and an NGO audience. These different needs must be taken into consideration.

The Three Levels of Framing

The task of framing the GII is considerable, but systematic. It takes place on three levels: (1) The *general* level of international moral norms in the world community; (2) the *type-of-issue* level, which includes, say, women's rights or the environment; and (3) the level of *specific issues*, like rainforests or the treatment of women by the Taliban.

?? At the *general* level, the very idea of international moral norms will have to be framed in terms of nurturant morality (or the ethics of care). The values behind the norms must be clear. **A member of the world community is expected to be empathetic to the needs of others who cannot take care of themselves, responsible for himself and for other community members, sufficiently competent to carry out one's responsibilities, fair and respectful in dealing with others, protective of the helpless, cooperative with others, and so on.** Foreign policy is then directed toward establishing and maintaining international moral norms, with the idea that it is better to live in a world governed by moral norms than by self-interest.

If such a *general* view of foreign policy is accepted, then *types of issues* like women's rights will automatically be part of foreign policy discourse, as will *specific issues*, say, the treatment of women by the Taliban. If the *general* level of framing succeeds, everything else is made easier.

?? At the *type-of-issue* level, each of the many large concerns of the GII — e.g., the environment, human rights — has to be framed, one by one, as the natural responsibility of world community members and as an urgent need.

There are tricky issues at this level. For example, in Kosovo, the Clinton administration tried to co-opt the balance of power metaphor in the name of human rights, arguing that Yugoslavia was in an "earthquake" zone and that the stability of the region was threatened by ethnic cleansing. This raises a difficult general question for evaluation. Should one attempt to co-opt other metaphors (e.g., the national interest with gains and losses, national security, balance of power, democracy as capitalism) or are there more effective ways to go about reframing?

One of the administration's strategies has been to attempt to redefine "national security" so that morally-based interventions like those in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Haiti are called issues of "national security." The rational basis for this redefinition makes sense: we will all be more secure if we live in a world governed by moral norms.

And yet there is a semantic problem. The term "national security" has become associated with protecting our nation from foreign invasion or some other form of attack or danger. The term "security" conjures up security in one's home, being protected by boundaries that cannot be crossed by those who would harm you. This simply doesn't fit military interventions whose purpose is to maintain international moral norms. When the Clinton administration attempted such a redefinition without laying the semantic groundwork well in advance, it opened itself up to ridicule like that hurled by Mandelbaum and McCain.

The attempt at co-opting the language did not work here. That does not mean co-opting language can never work. But co-opting takes some effort. It's not about changing a word here or there. It takes a well-directed, coordinated campaign of the sort carried out by the conservatives in the affirmative action arena where they co-opted the fairness issue and the "level playing field" metaphor. The Clinton administration did not do enough work to succeed at co-opting.

The groundwork that needed to be laid was both at the *general* level of international moral norms as necessary for security and the *type-of-issue* level where the case can be made that preventing genocide ("ethnic cleansing") is the kind moral norm required for living in a secure world.

?? Finally, at the lowest level, the *specific issues* have to be addressed one at a time as they arise. Each *specific issue* has to be formulated so that it is clear what *type-of-issue* it is. If the *types-of-issue* are recognized as matters of foreign policy, then the specific issue will fit too. For example, the extinction of whales is a *specific issue*, with ecology as a *type of issue*.

The Causal and Moral Framing of Specific Issues

The task of strategic reframing at the *general* and *type-of-issue* levels needs to be ongoing, but it hasn't been. The reason it has been persistent is that there are other, well-entrenched conceptions of foreign policy that cannot be easily supplanted. The issues at the *specific* level are timely and require a different kind of attention, simply because they are constantly changing.

Most policy research, legislation, and media attention is focused on the *specific issue* level. When Kofi Annan had to illustrate the *general level* world community and international norms metaphors, he had to do it with *specific issues* like East Timor, Kosovo, Somalia, and so on. When Mandelbaum attacked Clinton policy, it was an attack at the *general level* of moral norms policy, but using examples from the *specific issues* level. McCain's stump speech remarks also constituted an attack at the *general level* of moral norms policy using a vivid image from the *specific issue* level — the image of a GI's body being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. The issues at the *specific* level are the episodic issues, presented one at a time as if they had no context. They are the ones on the public radar screen. What is left out of news coverage is the *general level* analysis, the analysis that provides causal, explanatory, and moral content to the episode on the evening news.

When *specific issues* are discussed, they have to be very carefully framed to fit into *type-of-issue* and *general level* framing. In replying to an attack on a *specific* issue, one must analyze the *type-of-issue* and *general level* framing implicit in the attack. Such an attack is virtually never just at the *specific* level, because the causal and moral content that make the attack an *attack* are at the higher levels. **When attacked on a specific issue, always look for the general level framing. In replying, reframe the specific issue at the general level, where you can change the causal basis and the moral interpretation of the attack.** It is at the *general* level that the answer to the question "Who's to blame?" is answered.

This means that the kind of rhetoric used in discussions of *specific issues* must be chosen with the greatest care so as not to accept and therefore support *general level* framing of the other side. Indeed, this is one of the greatest problems that progressives have in dealing with the media.

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The Second Debate Replayed

We have all been in a position where we wish we could replay the tape, where we think, "I should have said ..." But it is not always obvious just what we should have said.

Let us return to the Second Debate of the 2000 election campaign, to the point where Bush suggested that Gore's foreign policy amounted to "nation-building." The Clinton administration had not been explicit about the basis for its policy and had not given the media explicit language for public discussion. Gore had not done any better in his campaign or in the early stages of the debate. This left the door wide open for Bush to characterize Gore's policy in a way that sounded ridiculous. Without an explicit way to frame his own policy at the *general* level, Gore floundered and wound up accepting Bush's "nation-building" characterization and trying to defend it.

Gore needed to reply at the *general* level; he needed to reframe at the highest level. Here's what I think he should have said:

The foreign policy difference between myself and Governor Bush is profound and fundamental. It can be stated in a simple, straightforward way: Should the world be governed by moral standards, standards of humane conduct — or should it be governed by self-interest?

Governor Bush stands for a world where self-interest reigns and where America just looks out for itself. I stand for a world governed by international moral standards, by American values worth giving to the world. Certain of those standards are clear. The world cannot be governed by genocide and ethnic cleansing. The Governor's father, President Bush, refused to intervene in Bosnia when Milosevic's henchmen began a systematic program of oppression, torture,

rape, and extermination. He said it was not in America's self-interest to intervene, just as Governor Bush has just said that America's foreign policy should be governed by self-interest.

But I see America as a moral force in the world. We intervened in Bosnia and Kosovo because it was the right thing to do. We intervened in Haiti because it was right — because a fledgling democracy needed a fighting chance against the paramilitary thugs left over from the previous dictatorship. We intervened in Somalia because it was right — because we could not stand by and see millions left to starve, and our intervention saved half a million lives.

Those are the right values and world affairs should be governed by those values, not just by self-interest. If America ignores those values and just looks out for itself, how can we expect other nations to live by international standards — moral standards that define humane conduct? American leadership must be moral leadership and set an example for the rest of the world.

The governor is so focused on self-interest that he confused moral leadership with nation-building. Only the nations themselves can engage in nation-building. Only *we* can provide the kind of moral leadership the world needs to make most nations good nations.

Such a reply would have shifted the frame. It would have imposed at the highest level a foreign policy perspective based on moral norms. It would have made a self-interest policy seem immoral. By imposing a *general* level frame of this sort, you force the discourse to fit it. And you provide an overall logic, in which everything that you have to say at lower levels makes sense.

This is not an isolated case. It is an application of general principles governing human discourse.

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Replying to Tough Questions

What makes a question a "tough question" is that it is framed from a perspective, especially a moral perspective, directly opposed to yours. It is especially tough when the question does not wear its framing on its sleeve, when it is hidden and implicit. Your job is to give an honest straightforward answer from your own perspective. That requires shifting the frame to your own moral perspective first and choosing appropriate metaphors to say what you want to say.

Effective Framing

Effective framing is a means for giving sincere, honest, open answers - for communicating what you really believe and for doing so effectively. The problem of effective framing arises because framing is everywhere. Every word comes with a frame. Every discourse has implicit framing where no words need

be said. If everyone had the same frames, this exercise would be useless. But people differ radically in how they frame the world, especially in politics. Political arguments are typically about whose framing to accept.

For this reason, if you want to communicate what you believe (and perhaps even clarify it for yourself), some practice in recognizing and shifting frames is necessary.

Some Basic Rules

There are certain rules governing effective responses:.

1. *Never negate!* Negating within someone else's frame uses their frame and reinforces it. If I say, "Don't think of an elephant," you have to think of an elephant in order to try not thinking of it. When Richard Nixon, in the Watergate scandal, said to the American people, "I am not a crook!" he evoked the very image of himself as a crook that he was trying to deny. If you say, "Supporting ecology is not against our self-interest," you will be reinforcing the idea that foreign policy is about self-interest. Always be positive in your responses.

There is an important qualification to this. It is possible, if you are careful, to use a negative to reject the frame. For example, take the sentence, "We want the world to be governed by moral norms, not self-interest." Here the sentence offers a comparison of two ways in which the world might be governed, affirms one of them and rejects the other. But most of the time, when you use a negative, you use it *within* a frame, as in the "I am not a crook" example.

2. *Reframe first.* Begin your response with a statement establishing your frame, a statement that would be hard to deny in public. Once the frame is established, the rest of your response should fit the logic of the frame, which will make it similarly undeniable.
3. *Frames overwhelm facts.* If a fact hits an established contradictory frame, the frame will win. If you have factual evidence to offer against the presupposed framing of the question, offer it only after you have shifted to your own framework.
4. *Don't Use a Frame You Don't Accept:* For example, when using a moral norms argument, never give a self-interest argument in addition. Don't try to argue: It's right - and it's in our self-interest too.

This is a subtle point, which we discussed at length in Chapter 5. You might think that considerations of self-interest, in the right circumstances, would just add another argument for moral norms. It doesn't, because the self-interest frame inhibits the moral norms frame.

The Questions

Here is a list of questions. Each one is framed from an anti-GII perspective. Each response switches to a Moral Norms perspective.

(3) Why should the United States limit any of its options in foreign policy by getting involved in international initiatives?

This is a decent nation. Decent people are concerned with those around them, they have relationships with people in their communities, they have community responsibilities, and they act responsibly and honorably. This doesn't take away options; it gives them more. Being respected and having ties within the world community maximizes your options, rather than minimizing them.

7. *If the United States knows better how to solve problems - due to superior technology, better science, better organization, and so on - why should we subordinate our decision-making to foreign groups?*

To solve a problem, you have to know what makes it a problem. You need information from people closest to the problem. And you need the best expertise available in the area of the problem. Part of what makes us such good problem solvers is that we know these things and know how to cooperate with those whose knowledge and skills complement ours.

It should not be surprising that the best information and expertise needed to solve an international problem may come from the international community at large. Only a bad problem solver ignores the best information available and the best available expertise.

f. *We have enough problems at home. Why should we devote even more resources to help foreign countries?*

The US is wealthier and more powerful than any nation in the history of the world. With that position comes responsibilities of various kinds. Yes, we do have to set an example for the world by addressing our problems at home. But we also have to offer world leadership. And right now we're not doing our share.

We also have to remember that what goes around, comes around. The good we do comes back to us in many ways. If other countries become better off economically, they can buy our products. If conflicts are resolved early, our soldiers won't have to go to war. The less suffering and strife there is in the world, the better off we all are. And the more we contribute to a better world, the more we will be liked and respected.

Note: This is not a self-interest framing. In a self-interest frame, the reason for action is to further your self-interest. In this case, the reason for action is moral. The what-goes-around-comes-around frame is about the consequences of morally-based action.

aa. There will always be problems in the world — hunger, poverty, ethnic conflict, etc. Why should we waste resources trying to solve problems that can never be solved?

There are many specific, concrete, and achievable solutions to problems in the world, both large and small. The US, working with the world community, can make life better for many, many people. We should do what we can do.

Despite our wealth and power, we have limitations. But we should do everything we can within those limitations.

?? Why should we put American soldiers' lives at risk to help address these intractable problems?

Getting involved in the world in nonmilitary ways now can prevent the need for military action later. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Development aid is not only the cheapest form of defense, but by far the most humane. If we do nothing, American soldiers lives will be put at risk sooner or later. We can act in the world in a way that minimizes that possibility.

?? How can we justify moving towards greater international involvement when there's no mandate for that in the public?

The work of many public opinion experts has established beyond the shadow of a doubt that Americans on the whole strongly support US involvement in the world for the betterment of others. They support the UN and believe we should pay our dues. They're comfortable with joint decision-making with other countries and with joint military operations. They want us to do our share by cooperating with other countries.

The problem is not the public, but our foreign policy elites who are not in tune with the public. Americans see themselves as comprising a decent nation, a nation that should act morally in the world and not just for its own self-interest.

?? *What business do we have telling nations governed by Muslim law that they should change the way women are treated? For example, Saudi Arabia is a friend and ally of the US. It sells us reasonably priced oil and we protect it from its neighbors. What business would we have telling the Saudis what religion to accept and what laws their country should be run by?*

Saudi Arabia is like many nations governed by Muslim law. It is a member of the United Nations and a signatory to its charter, whose preamble commits those signatories to the equality of men and women. It has itself undertaken a commitment to international moral norms that it is not honoring.

When the very laws of a nation violate international moral norms — especially norms that it has subscribed to — other nations have not only a right, but a duty, to speak up and to exert pressure for change.

The great religions of the world all have ethical versions. A commitment to Islam does not have to be a commitment to the oppression of women.

The unequal treatment of women is an immoral practice wherever it occurs. To accept it is to weaken the moral norms that govern the world community.

?? *Don't violent protests like those in Seattle undermine support for your cause?*

The move from corporate globalization to ethical globalization is essential if the world is to be governed by moral norms. Peaceful mass demonstrations in favor of such moral norms can be important for mobilizing supporters, for bringing the issues to public scrutiny, and for disrupting the routine practices of unethical corporate globalization.

Most of what actually took place in Seattle was of this nature — peaceful demonstrations favoring an ethics of care in foreign policy.

But the Seattle demonstrations could have been far more effective. First, the small number of demonstrators committed to destroying property should have been actively isolated, discouraged, and disowned

in advance of the demonstrations. The media should have reported accurately the overall peaceful and positive tenor of the demonstrations, rather than letting a small fringe dominate headlines.

Second, the groups demonstrating needed to have a single overall, positive, effective message expressed clearly and succinctly. Here is an example of what such a message might be:

"We support ethical globalization: We are asking for trade laws that favor what is best for the people of the world, not just for corporate profits.

This includes at least:

- ?? ecologically responsible development,
- ?? socially responsible economic policies,
- ?? anti-sweatshop and child labor laws and other fair labor laws, and
- ?? the rights of indigenous peoples to their lands and ways of life.

Corporate globalization just looks at the bottom line and ignores the moral dimension of world trade."

A Final Note

Do not expect to convince the person asking such questions. When you are replying to such questions in public, you are performing what linguists call "lateral speech acts." You are really speaking to the audience. Your main job is to communicate your frames, the lens through which you see the world. If you can communicate a nurturant moral norms frame for understanding what foreign policy is, and if you can communicate it to the right audience, you can change foreign policy to embrace GII goals.

Traps

Here are some traps to avoid.

Trap #1. *The truth will set you free.* There are a great many people who believe that if you just get the facts out there, published in a newspaper or shown on TV, then people will see the facts for what they are and make appropriate changes in the world.

This is simply false. News reporting of facts is episodic, as if the facts were isolated and the result of nothing more than mayhem or natural forces. Without a causal and moral framing to say who is responsible and why it was wrong, the facts as reported don't mean much. Moreover, facts can be framed in many ways. Those with other moral worldviews than yours can all too often frame the facts to fit their worldview.

Facts must be framed with causal and moral content. They must be framed so as to fit ongoing public discourse. The images associated with the facts must come with a moral meaning, a sense of who is responsible, and a sense of what can be done. Those images must come with effective language, language that attributes causal and moral responsibility. Moreover, the fact cannot appear just once in the media. For a fact to become an issue that the public is aware of and cares about, it must be reported on over a period of time.

Trap # 2. *If you show that a position is logically contradictory, or irrational, then you will change people's minds.* Again, this is not true. People tend not to think about politics and social issues in terms of logic. They think in terms of metaphor and other ways in which issues are framed. Logical contradictions, like being pro-life and for the death penalty, need not be seen as contradictions from the perspective of moral frameworks, which are characterized via metaphorical, not literal thought.

Trap # 3. *A catchy slogan is enough.* Catchy slogans may help, but they don't go very far. The kind of reframing necessary for the GII takes a lot of effort, in a lot of areas, over a long time.

Trap # 4. *We can just turn their language back on them,* Their language evokes their framing of the issues — even if you try twisting it and turning it back on them. What is needed is a reframing — an alternative conceptual framework through which specific proposals can be evaluated. Co-opting language, as we have seen, is not easy. It is possible in some circumstances, but it takes a lot of work.

Trap # 5. *An issue can be reframed by publishing a reframing of it.* The conceptual framing you bring to an issue is physically instantiated in the synapses of your brain.

New synapses for complex ideas don't form quickly or easily. Nor are the old ones replaced or inhibited quickly or easily. A complex reframing takes a long time and a lot of effort. To get an idea of just how much effort, think of how many years and how much money and man-hours it took for conservatives to reframe affirmative action in terms of "preferences." When the issue is American foreign policy, the reframing will not be accomplished overnight. But you've got to start somewhere.