

military intervention.” He has largely ignored the Rahbar (Supreme Leader), Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who will have a major say in who is permitted to run against Ahmadinejad in the upcoming election.

Sick believes that the Obama administration should reaffirm a tenet of the U.S.–Iran Algiers Accords of 1981, that the U.S. will not “intervene, directly or indirectly, politically or militarily, in Iran’s internal affairs,” an assurance that would greatly ease tensions between the two countries. It should also get behind a proposal floated during the Bush administration to establish an interest section in Tehran, “in effect a consular office in Iran staffed by U.S. diplomats.” Neither of these gestures “will resolve the major differences between the United States and Iran concerning [Iran’s] nuclear program, its military support for organizations like Hezbollah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad, and its opposition to an Israeli-Palestinian settlement.”

Those issues are unlikely to be resolved before Iran’s presidential election anyway. But Iran can fill a vital role in “maintaining stability and calm during a period of transition,” Sick says, as the Obama administration begins to draw down troop levels in Iraq while increasing them in Afghanistan. (The current schedule calls for U.S. forces to leave Iraqi cities and suburbs by the end of June of this year, and for all combat forces to be out of the country by August 2010.) By taking small

diplomatic steps now, the United States can lay the groundwork for Iran to play a responsible role in regional politics, Sick believes.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Magnifying American Power

THE SOURCE: “Reshaping the World Order” by Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, in *Foreign Affairs*, March–April 2009.

THE INSTITUTIONS THAT GOVERN international relations, from the United Nations Security Council to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty regime, are about as well suited to their tasks as a 1950s Philco TV would be to screening the next Olympics. Dartmouth political scientists Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth call the architecture of the world’s international institutions a “relic” of the mid-20th century, out of sync with today’s challenges of rising nations, terrorism, financial instability, and global warming.

In a 2007 speech, Barack Obama himself named two of the agencies that critics think most urgently need reform, the United Nations and the World Bank. The UN Security Council, for example, is led by a different one of 15 nations every month, with important decisions subject to the absolute veto of any one of the five winners of World War II. The World Bank, which helps developing countries, always has a president from the United States.

America, far and away the

richest and most powerful country in the world, has the means to lead needed reforms, and strong motives to do so. “Overall, international institutions channel the United States’ power and enhance its security,” argue Brooks and Wohlforth. Such institutions can perform tasks—think inspecting nuclear facilities, gathering intelligence about Islamic terrorism, or enforcing free-trade rules—that would be much harder for the United States to do alone. Even building coalitions of the willing is an inefficient approach to national security, the authors say, because each potential partner must be recruited with a different set of carrots and sticks.

The Bush administration’s unilateralism hurt American prestige, but the damage can be reversed, Brooks and Wohlforth believe. Even some nations that oppose the United States think that its “leadership is natural under the circumstances or the best that can be expected.”

In fact, the Bush administration was a “strikingly successful” international leader when it put its mind to it. For instance, it pushed through the Proliferation Security Initiative, a framework for interdicting weapons of mass destruction at sea, on land, and in the air. Designed to give the U.S. Navy more latitude to stop ships that might be carrying weapons of mass destruction, the proliferation initiative was sold successfully as a “global effort” even though it tended to benefit the Americans more than anybody else.