

# Incoming President's Message

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**T**he state of the Council, to borrow the parlance of Washington, is strong. Indeed, the Council on Foreign Relations is the premier organization in the field; credit and thanks are due to many, but above all to Leslie H. Gelb for his decade of extraordinary service and accomplishment.

The Council is a unique hybrid—part membership, part think tank, part publisher, part nongovernmental organization—that possesses many strengths: an impressive and diverse membership; a professional, committed staff in both New York and Washington; a prestigious and engaged Board of Directors so ably led by Peter G. Peterson; an ambitious and often imaginative Meetings Program; *Foreign Affairs*, by far the most influential journal of its type; a budget in surplus and an endowment that has grown significantly over the past decade despite the market downturn; a modern, flexible physical plant; and a state-of-the-art website.

Such strengths can and should be sustained and even enhanced. Possible initiatives include starting up a postdoctoral fellowship program, augmenting efforts designed to engage members of Congress and their staff, increasing activities via the National Program for the more than one-third of the membership that resides outside New York and Washington, and undertaking new efforts to build the endowment.

In addition, I plan to place special emphasis on two aspects of Council activity. The first involves the Council as a think tank. This ought to be a golden age for the Studies Program; it is a moment when policymakers as well as citizens and students need help in understanding trends and developments as well as practical suggestions for what the United States should do in the world.

It is a moment for raising fundamental questions about international relations and American foreign policy. What should the United States do with its primacy, and how should it go about it? What is the right mix of national security tools, and how can they best be employed? How should the United States and the international community work to regulate the challenges associated with globalization, ranging from money flows and global climate change to terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and infectious diseases? In other words, what is both desirable and realistic in terms of global governance? What is the optimal division of labor among individual states, coalitions, regional bodies, and global institutions? What is the role of other major and medium powers, and what should the United States do to shape the behaviors of these states? What can be done to promote political and economic reform as well as moderation and tolerance in the Islamic world? How can the United States increase the odds that critical countries, including Pakistan, Indonesia, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, “succeed” and become relatively stable and open?



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The questions are as numerous as they are important. I look forward to working with incoming Director of Studies James M. Lindsay and with the Council's fellows in assembling a team of scholar-practitioners to tackle these issues—and in determining the best ways to disseminate insights and recommendations so that Council fellows, reports, and books can have even greater impact.

The second area of special focus involves outreach. I believe the Council should continue to steadily increase its outreach function, something that can be done without in any way diluting what is done for and with members. Outreach naturally builds upon one of the elements that makes the Council unique: New York City, where the Council is headquartered with a national membership and an international reputation. The Council is intellectually open at a time many other think tanks are intentionally or unintentionally becoming more ideological and predictable. The Council also has a close relationship with the business community.

All this suggests the Council on Foreign Relations "brand" is a major asset. The Council should aim to strengthen its position as "a" and arguably "the" principal provider of background and analysis on international affairs and U.S. foreign policy. Media and schools might be the most valuable consumers (and, in turn, outlets). Indeed, the Council can play a major educational role—from curriculum development to teaching aids—that would benefit teachers and students alike. More generally, authoritative information and assessment is badly needed given a "debate" that too frequently mixes a lack of interest with heavily slanted advocacy disguised (at times barely) by analysis. *Foreign Affairs*, the Council's website, and regular briefings for and meetings with jour-



*Richard N. Haass and Carla A. Hills at the Council.*

nalists would appear to be the best means of providing and disseminating such content.

Much of what I have written here is necessarily tentative, as I want and need to spend much more time meeting with Board members and those working at the Council. I also look forward to hearing from and working with Council members around the country. Not tentative, however, are my goals. I am committed to a Council that is valued by members, listened to by policymakers and Congress, universally trusted to be non-partisan, sought out by the media, respected by academics, and relied on by teachers and students. I am grateful for this opportunity to build on the legacy of Les Gelb and others and excited by the challenge of helping to lead this extraordinary organization into the future.

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President