

MEETING SUMMARY  
THE SPECIAL ENVOY IN AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY  
Great Decisions, September 28, 2010  
by Elizabeth Hall

Recommended Books:

The Moral Imagination John Paul Lederach (Oxford Univ Press)  
Washington Rules: America's Path to Permanent War Andrew J.  
Bacevich (Metropolitan Books)  
The Rational Optimist Matt Ridley (Harper)

Using the U.N. or Tony Blair to negotiate world problems may result in an outcome that is not in our national interest. Tony Blair has clout and world credibility. Could he do the job?

By selecting American envoys, we get people well-suited for particular problems. But an envoy [no matter from what country] always advances his or her own country's interest. An envoy needs to have a respected body of public service.

The U.S. has a consistent pattern of sticking to its own interests. It often refuses to ratify negotiated international agreements. So an international group wouldn't work. Is the U.S. becoming an imperialist power? We're more interested in what's right for the United States instead of what's right for the world. The military establishment and its allies have too much power. We have too many military installations around the world. Most conservatives venerate the military establishment. We're not willing to pull back from our world-wide military bases. There's a strong trend in the U.S. to ignore the interests of other countries.

Bacevich's *Washington Rules* criticism of this country's militaristic approach to the world is blunt. We just don't know what's going on. Comparing the sums spent on military with the trivial sums spent on aid is astounding. Is the U.S. the best country to take on the role of solving the world's problems.

We have a federal department created to handle international problems. Why can't we find people within the State Department who can carry out the special envoy mission effectively? When Richard Holbrooke took on the Pakistan/Afghanistan problem, he immediately hired a staff of 30. Where did they come from? We'd hope they have expertise. Were some from the State Department? Mitchell is well-suited to the Israel/Palestine situation.

Special envoys and their staffs presumably spend all their time on specific problems. There's an intense focus, as well as a direct conduit to the President. The State Department's role is to focus on our relationship with various countries. Special envoys focus on specific problems. They could be "neutral" in regard to U.S. policies.

One problem is that too many ambassadors are political appointees who don't have experience or knowledge of the country in which they're stationed. They may not even speak the language.

The public face—what we see, read about in public statements and the media regarding negotiations—may not reflect reality. Do we actually know what's going on?

The United States' attempt to promote world-wide democracy is unrealistic and could be dangerous. It's unrealistic to try to establish democracy in countries with no such traditions.

When the U.N. was set up, the major powers insisted on the Security Council with its veto. In terms of its past ineffectiveness, can the U.N. do it? How does the U.N. need to be reorganized to handle world problems effectively? It should take on a more extensive role. We'll eventually be #2 nation. What we do now will affect events 20-30 years from now. It would be better for the U.S. to set up the world for the time when we're #2. All countries in the U.N. have hidden agendas. How do you eliminate the power the special interest groups? How should the U.N. be reorganized or replaced so they can do a better job?

We're sending the same old faces out as special envoys. Other people wouldn't carry the same baggage. We have skilled people who speak the languages of other countries. Do their ideas get torpedoed by the defense industry, the oil industry? These are short-term interests. You can't negotiate with religious fundamentalists. They can't be moved from their rigid positions—even if it's in the best interest of their countries.

Special envoys should be celebrated, because their appointment shows a willingness to go out in the world and negotiate.

In the Midwest, Rush Limbaugh is God. "American exceptionalism" is heard more and more among Tea Party adherents.

Wilson incorporated evangelicism into his international views: "making the world safe for democracy." The idea that democratic governments are "divinely ordained." This sort of belief helps to explain the fervor in Tea Party Groups.

If American exceptionalism takes hold, we're talking about isolation. Domestic policy drives foreign policy. The U.S. is far and away the biggest economic power in the world. The media may be giving us an unbalanced picture of world situations.

Our strength in economics and education, our power and prestige has given us a responsibility toward other nations, although we sometimes exercise it in a condescending manner. What's best for the world may not always be what's best for us. We need to rethink some of our positions.

focus on specific problems. They could be "neutral" in regard to U.S. policies. The whole world is looking at us. But some of our "first places" are not so praiseworthy;

we're no. 1 in the world in prison population.

The more global we are economically, the more small "neighborhood countries" we have. Many of these little countries hate one another. When the Security Council was first set up, it formed hostile blocs (e.g., US vs. USSR).

We are making some steps forward. Read *The Rational Optimist*. Many good things are happening: education, lifting people out of poverty; women's rights. These advances are not being built upon.

The most important issue may be the Supreme Court ruling regarding corporate and group contributions to political campaigns. The decision hijacks the entire democratic system and will rapidly undermine our democracy. It must be looked at seriously. It will allow the military/industrial complex to take us off on a terrible trajectory.

We were brought up to believe that democracy was best. But it's not necessarily the best system for all countries, nor is it best in all ways.

The GNP per capita: The gross national product divided by the population gives a measure of the productive capacity of the workers in an economy, but is sometimes used as a rough estimate of average income per person. Most figures do not take into account differences in the [HYPERLINK "http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cost\\_of\\_living"](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cost_of_living) \o "Cost of living" [cost of living](#) in different countries, and the results can vary greatly from one year to another based on fluctuations in the [HYPERLINK "http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exchange\\_rate"](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exchange_rate) \o "Exchange rate" [exchange rates](#) of the country's [HYPERLINK "http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Currency"](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Currency) \o "Currency" [currency](#). Such fluctuations may change a country's ranking from one year to the next, even though they often make little or no difference to the standard of living of its population. Therefore these figures should be used with caution. [This comes from Wikipedia, which compares the lists for 2009 as provided by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. On the first list, the US comes in 9<sup>th</sup>; on the second, it comes in 13<sup>th</sup>.] The same GNP allows more money for military, depending on such things as cost of living.

It may help to compare China and the U.S. In the U.S. our efficiency has declined while the amount spent to elect officials has gone up radically.

In China, the universe is seen as ordered, with leaders seen as "official of heaven." China has democracy "in extremis." It can easily revolt and throw out the administration when things get bad.

When IBM has specific problems or needs trouble-shooting, it sets up a task force. The task force has direct communication with the head of the company.

The book, *The Moral Imagination*, makes it clear that we live in a web of relationships. [Sorry, my notes are unclear at this point, so I pulled up these two review excerpts from amazon.com.]

"Today the telecommunications and transport revolution has made the world a

smaller place offering both an opportunity and challenge to the major leading countries to come together to shape the world, overcome violence and create a peaceful global community. John Paul Lederach presents a powerful case for the use of the moral imagination in rising to this challenge, thus creating authentic new possibilities. This book provides a valuable contribution to peacebuilding literature and I welcome it wholeheartedly." --John Hume, Winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace

"In *The Moral Imagination*, John Paul Lederach has written an inspiring and uplifting book that goes straight to the heart of what is required to bring a change in a destructive cycle of violence, to alter an oppressive social relationship, or to understand the foundation of an intractable conflict. Lederach uses the tools of natural science, poetry, folk lore, and physics, as well the wisdom of people who have exhibited courage in the face of violence, to consider the essence of effective peacemaking. This is a book that will help deepen the thinking and the peacemaking practice of all who read it."--Bernard Mayer, author of *Beyond Neutrality: Confronting the Crisis in Conflict Resolution*

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