

**FEDERAL POLICY BRIEFING**  
***ADVANCING PEACE, SECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS***  
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**Tour of the Horizon: Human Rights and International Security on the  
National Political Agenda**

March 18, 2013, 9:00 - 10:30 am

***Speakers***

- **Heather Hurlburt**, Executive Director, National Security Network
- **Tom Malinowski**, Washington Director, Human Rights Watch

***Facilitator***

- **Conrad Martin**, Executive Director, Stewart R. Mott Foundation

In this session, advocates provided an analysis of the issues, players, and strategies in the broad areas of national security and human rights policies.

Heather Hurlburt opened with good and bad news: Right now is the least partisan period of the next four years. This is as good as it is going to get. In this climate there are some interesting opportunities for advocacy, while at the same time, politics seem stuck. The challenge for funders is to figure out where there are possibilities and how to best engage with them.

The Obama Administration is currently domestically focused, which may allow opportunities to “sneak” human rights and peace and security issues in. The Republican Party continues to experience in-fighting and there is uncertainty about who will be the lead candidate for 2016.

- It is unclear what the Administration’s priorities are for the second term.
- Different parts of the Administration are voicing different messages over targeted killing policies.
- There is resentment and frustration about how the Administration and Congress engage with each other.
- What will happen in 2016? What can funders and advocates do to raise up the issues that candidates will fight to have high ground on in 2016?
- No one knows what the post 9/11 era looks like.

A budget lens is now applied to everything, which is not necessarily good news. Drones are cheaper than troops, nuclear weapons are cheaper than massive forces, and it is easier to cut foreign assistance than military spending.

Administration officials do not know how human rights and peace and security issues play with the public anymore. Given the possible political risks, funders and advocates must be in a position to convince elected officials that they “have their backs.”

### Key Issues

- North Korea is the lens through which the U.S. views nuclear weapons. Advocates are ill prepared to engage in this conversation.
- Targeted killing is an issue with interesting potential for the movement. There are high-level officials that believe in more oversight. Advocates won't get everything they want, but there is opportunity here if advocates move quickly and are clear on how much change is enough.
- There is intense debate within the advocacy community about whether the Administration will order a strike on Iran. Hurlburt thinks they will. The best case scenario is that we maintain the uneasy status quo and remain nervous about Iran's potential actions.
- On Pentagon spending, advocates are winning because most budgets propose cutting military spending. Advocates need to keep up pressure in support of cuts and communicate the kind of military they want.
- Lurking issues:
  - Mali
  - Syria. There is concern that the conflict will continue and that Syria may end up in the center of the regional war in the Middle East.
  - Withdrawal from Afghanistan. Americans are done with this war so it will be difficult to get people to pay attention to human rights concerns there.
  - Israeli/Palestinian conflict
  - Venezuela and death of Chavez
  - Nuclear issues
  - Treaties. Best strategy: start with Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and engage with veterans and Republican senators who are up for election in 2014 and demonstrate political consequences to voting against the treaty. Advocates need to show the relevance of treaties. Pick strategic issues for communities to work together and really work on them.

Tom Malinowski opened by saying that it is unclear what is going to happen. He believes that structurally this is the most nonpartisan moment in the next four years and that immigration reform has a chance to succeed.

- The Hill is hard to predict.
- The split within the Republican Party could create useful uncertainty.
- Part of the Republican Party's visceral hatred of Obama is only outweighed by the hatred of FOX News and the Tea Party by another part of the Party. For the party to accomplish anything, it will need to strike alliances with moderates. Some Republicans want to be more engaged internationally, others argue the opposite. For example, John McCain is desperate to go to Mali and wants to do more on Syria.
- The Middle East has changed, which has made Israel/Palestine still important but not THE central issue in the region anymore.
- Both agree that a few years from now Syria will still be a nightmare.

- He fears that the longer it takes for the U.S. to become deeply involved in Syria, the more costly and dangerous our inevitable involvement will be.
- The Egyptian military may be testing the waters to come back to power if President Morsi fails.
- Obama was right to get involved with Libya – the Administration’s action struck the right balance. Unfortunately the U.S. lost interest when Gaddafi died. There is a strong argument for the Administration to re-engage to ensure that success is not lost.
- Some opportunities for diplomacy exist in the Middle East, such as Bahrain.
- There is an opportunity to refocus on North Korea as the worst human rights crisis anywhere in the world. There is a growing consensus that the U.S. bipartisan policy toward North Korea over the past 20 years has been a total failure. If the U.S. talks about labor camps and human rights and forms coalitions with Japan and South Korea, North Korea may want to restart nuclear talks. There could be a hard security pay off.
- China will surprise us. No idea how.
- Russia leader Putin fundamentally disagrees with the U.S.. Russian people are a variable we have no control over, same as the Chinese people.
- There is a potential libertarian and liberal alliance on some domestic issues.
- A brewing debate is the authorization on use of military force. The U.S. got rid of most of Al Qaeda, but there are still many terrorists. There is a temptation to keep these powers, even though the original situation has changed.
- If the White House doesn’t lead the fight to close Guantanamo, no one else will.
- Money is now a central factor to every conversation. However people around the world do not understand that; they see budget cuts in foreign policy as the U.S. choosing not to support them.
- The military budget is too high, but it is being cut for the wrong reasons – because everything is being cut, not because there is an imbalance. It is also being cut in the wrong ways.
- In the midst of all of this uncertainty, what can funders and advocates do as a community? Capitalize on opportunities for the U.S. to do the right thing, not just respond reactively. Learn from examples from the past, e.g. torture.

### **Question & Answer**

Q: There are many lessons learned from the wars that the U.S. has fought. Will the U.S. learn from these lessons and put into place checks and balances?

A: For all of the ways that the media we have now is worse than ten years ago, the media has learned lessons and so has the advocacy community. At the same time, U.S. politics have deteriorated dramatically. There is a feeling that the U.S. knows that what it is doing is wrong but is going to do it anyways. It is too politically costly to act on lessons learned. People in the Administration are too willing to believe information stamped with “top secret”. The fewer people see it the less fact checking it gets.

Q: How did the media space open up? What are the opportunities?

A: One success is opening up this idea that every dollar spent on the Pentagon doesn’t make people safer. Advocacy has succeeded in connecting on this issue. Some generals are

acknowledging that tough choices need to be made regarding military spending. The bad news is that that was the easy part and it wasn't easy. Having a substantive policy debate about what should be is more difficult.

Q: How can "security" be framed beyond military security?

A: Convince policy makers why they should care. Reframe "security" to include the economy and jobs. The future and education are lenses that Americans are using to see the world. When Americans saw the economy collapsing, they saw that their place in the world could collapse. Advocates need to be in the media telling the important stories.

Q: How much would it take to convince the President to sign the anti-landmines treaty?

A: He will likely sign by the end of the second administration. With regards to the arms trade treaty, the U.S. will not block it, but also will not sign. This will take continued advocacy.