

The “Collective Mind” of the Obama Administration: Central Concepts and Figures of Speech of Obama’s Approach to the Islamic World¹

G. Matthew Bonham
Syracuse University

Daniel Heradstveit
Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Oslo

Victor M. Sergeev
Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO)

Introduction

In an earlier paper Bonham and Heradstveit analyzed the figurative language, particularly metaphors, in President Obama’s speech at Cairo University on 4 June 2009, where he proposed a “new beginning.”² Whereas President Bush will be remembered for the skillful but misguided construction of a new way of seeing the world, Obama is seen as proposing through his references to the Holy Koran and “a new beginning” an attempt to empathize with the “other” and regain control over how the Muslim world sees the United States and the West.

In this paper, we situate President Obama’s figurative language in a larger context, one which is based on an analysis of a cognitive map, not only of Obama himself, but of the social network involved in US foreign-policy decision-making. This map was constructed from more than 350 texts of 46 officials, assembled as a “collective mind” of the Obama Administration. We will use this cognitive map to discover links between the central concepts of Obama’s approach to the Islamic world, the “semantic integrators,” and his figurative language. Our analysis will show that two of these basic semantic integrators, THE NEW POLITICS OF OBAMA, and DIFFERENCE WITH BUSH POLITICS, are clearly reflected in his use of figurative language. We will also discuss the some of the challenges that President Obama faces with respect to the Muslim world, where he is attempting to deliver a clear-cut message to multiple audiences who do not share his own cultural, political, and religious traditions.

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² G. Matthew Bonham and Daniel Heradstveit, “From Axis of Evil to a New Beginning: Discourses of Bush and Obama,” Paper Presented at the International Society of Political Psychology, Annual Convention, 7 July 2010, San Francisco, CA, USA.

The “Collective Mind” of the Obama Administration

In 2010 Sergeev and his colleagues conducted an extensive analysis of the central concepts of members of the Obama Administration.³ After identifying President Obama’s social network, they used cognitive mapping techniques to code and represent graphically the speeches and Congressional testimony of 46 persons who occupied the center of his network. By combining the cognitive maps of each person, they were able to create a representation of the “collective mind” of the Obama Administration. Analysis of this representation enabled Sergeev and his colleagues to identify the “basic semantic integrators” of the resulting “collective mind,” which are both central nodes and metaphorical in nature. These basic semantic integrators are organizing concepts that compress fragments of the combined representation into more or less compact structures.

In the section of the cognitive map representation of the Central Region (the Greater Middle East), Sergeev and his colleagues found the basic semantic integrator, THE NEW POLITICS OF OBAMA, which is an attempt “to deal with the causes of problems rather than symptoms and engage in a counterproductive struggle with consequences.” Further analysis revealed one other basic semantic integrator, DIFFERENCE WITH BUSH POLITICS, which appears to be a public refutation of the political views of the Bush Administration.

The basic semantic integrator is DIFFERENCE WITH BUSH POLITICS, and the concrete meaning of this semantic integrator is the public refutation by Barak Obama of the politics of the Bush Administration (Sergeev et al., 2011).

The speaker who introduced THE NEW POLITICS OF OBAMA this into the discourse was John O. Brennan, Deputy National Security Advisor for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, and Assistant to the President. The same integrator was actively used by Dennis Ross, Special Assistant to President Obama and Senior Director of the Central Region at the National Security Council, Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense, Secretary of the Treasury, Timothy Geithner, Thomas E. Donilon, National Security Advisor as well as other advisors.

According to Sergeev and his colleagues, the semantic meaning of the integrator, THE NEW POLITICS OF OBAMA, is presented as “dealing with causes rather than a hopeless and counter-productive struggle with consequences as did Bush.” According to these speakers the politics of Bush practically always reduced itself to a brute force struggle against symptoms. But in principle, this approach cannot solve the problem, because it does not deal with causes and often aggravates the problem. The brutality of attempts to solve

³ V. M. Sergeev, E. S. Alexseenkova, K. E. Koktysh, A. S. Orlova, E. S. Chimiris, and K. E. Petrov, “Cognitive Map of Scenarios of the World Economic Situation in Middle Term.” Center for the Study of Global Problems, International Studies Center, MGIMO University, 2011, forthcoming. Translations from Russian to English by the author.

the problem, under conditions of ineffectiveness of plans for achieving the goals, damaged the foreign policy of the United States, according to this view. In contrast with Bush, THE NEW POLITICS OF OBAMA focuses on the elimination of the causes of the problem, and, as a result, it is much more effective and deprived of the brutality of Bush. This new policy may be attractive and support the international prestige of the United States. The authors of this study observed that the role of causes in these texts as a rule are reduced to social ones, and the method of solving them is reduced to the necessity for the US to invest in the process of socialization.

The basic integrator, THE NEW POLITICS OF OBAMA, is most actively used in statements related to problems in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as challenges which emerged from the problem of global terrorism. This metaphor appears only rarely, however, in discourses related to nuclear security and the Iranian nuclear problem, and it almost does not exist in discourses related to economic problems. Sergeev and his colleagues concluded from this observation that THE NEW POLITICS OF OBAMA does not extend or touch the Iranian nuclear problem, which means that the policy toward the Iranian nuclear problem will not be changed from the policy of the Bush Administration.

The view that Iran is a natural regional leader, whose ambition should be taken into account by American policy, is a complex and non-obvious position that was extracted from the sum of statements of American speakers, such as Dennis Blair, former Director of National Intelligence, Dennis Ross, and Robert Gates. This view reflects the classical realist position that “an enemy of our enemy is our friend.” Because Iran is an enemy of the Taliban, the status and growth of Iranian influence in the region has as a background the natural wish of the state to secure its position, but not Islamic fundamentalism. This view, according to Sergeev and his colleagues, seems to be a semantic fundament for the possibility of an extension of the basic integrator, THE NEW POLITICS OF OBAMA, to Iranian political discourse, if necessary. Sergeev and his colleagues argue that officials in the Obama Administration almost do not touch on the Iranian problem, because Obama does not know now what to do with Iran.

The third basic semantic integrator is the PROBLEM OF NON-PROLIFERATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS. Key speakers on this topic are Gary Samore, Special Assistant to the President and Coordinator for Arms Control and WMD, Proliferation and Terrorism, Dennis Ross, Thomas Donilon, and Robert Gates. In contrast to the first two integrators, this integrator presupposes not so much the actions and plans, but the preservation of the status quo as embodied in the non-proliferation treaty. As a supreme priority this also suggests certain kinds of conflict. The non-proliferation treaty is a kind of containing factor in the NEW POLITICS OF OBAMA, but all speakers said that the violation of this treaty may be much more costly.

President Obama's Figures of Speech

In this section we will describe and analyze linguistic formulations of President Barack Obama over the last two years as he talks about the Muslim world, particularly relations between the United States and Iran. For comparative purposes, we will also describe the approach of President George W. Bush to the Muslim world.

We are especially interested in President Obama's use of culturally-specific cognitive structures, including figurative language, to discuss the future of U.S.-Iranian relations.

To identify and analyze the connotative language of President Obama, we will make use of the technique of critical metaphor analysis. This approach is based on the work of Lakoff and Johnson, which has been further modified by others.⁴ "The basic claims of this approach are that the mind is inherently embodied, thought is mostly unconscious and abstract concepts are largely metaphorical."⁵

The technique provides an economical way of identifying metaphorical and metonymic thinking, as well as describing and conceptual metaphors. Additional [contextual] analysis is necessary, however, to provide the social and cultural context of the metaphor.⁶

To provide a contextual analysis, we turn to the continental semiotic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure. For Saussure, a sign consists of a **signifier** and a **signified**. The relationship between the signifier and the signified is referred to as **signification**, which is represented in the Saussurean diagram by arrows. The horizontal line marking the two elements of the sign is referred to as the bar. For example, the word "terrorist" is a *sign* consisting of the following: A *signifier*, the word "terrorist," and a *signified* concept—a person who attacks innocent civilian targets. A sign must have both a signifier and a signified. You cannot

⁴See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, **Philosophy in the Flesh: Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999; George Lakoff, **Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987; George Lakoff, "The Contemporary Metaphor" in A. Ortony (ed.) **Metaphor and Thought**, 2nd edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 202-51; and George Lakoff, **Moral Politics**, 2nd edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002; George Lakoff and Turner, **More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989; Mark Johnson, **The Body in the Mind**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

⁵Jonathan Charteris-Black, **Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor**. Palgrave-MacMillan, 2005, p. 26.

⁶Charteris-Black, p. 29.

have a totally meaningless signifier or a completely formless signified. The same signifier could stand for a different signified (and thus be a different sign).

In the case of terrorism, the signifier, “terrorism” is used widely by many including the governments of the USA, Russia, and Sri Lanka, but the signified, the perpetrators and what they do are quite different: Al-Qaida, the Chechens, and the Tamil Tigers. Because the designation of **signified** depends upon the speaker, the concept of terrorism is seems to be subjective and fluid. The **signified** switches radically both by context and over time. The only aspect that is stable is the **signifier**, “terrorism.”

The rhetoric of terrorism is being waged with “weapons” that are loose, diffuse, and highly flexible. The signifier is clear-cut, but the signified is not. Thus, the “war on terrorism” is largely a rhetorical instrument—a form of political communication that plays on emotions.

Metaphor as Political Communication

Denotative language uses many words in a seemingly neutral, precise manner to describe a phenomenon. For this reason it functions very poorly as a rhetorical instrument, for rhetoric works best with connotative language, i.e., using few words in a loose, diffuse and flexible manner. Rhetorical discourse is also affective, and there are few words that pack such an emotional punch as “terrorism.”

The use of metaphors, such as the “war on terrorism,” can be a highly effective technique of political communication. Such figures of speech are often used by political leaders to persuade others, including the leaders of other countries as well as their own people. Metaphors are powerful, because they exploit “the associative power of language and represent “a certain way of viewing the world that reflects a shared system of belief as to what the world is and culture-specific beliefs about mankind’s place in it....Metaphor *provokes* affective responses because it draws on value systems...embedded in a culture where certain types of entity are associated with positive or negative experiences or may be universal.”⁷

In the United States, for example, an ancestor of the “war on terrorism” is the “war on drugs,” which similarly legitimized extraordinary measures with consequences for due process and civil liberties. Common to both “wars” appears to be the financing of American police departments by forfeiture of assets considered to be drug- or terrorism-related, which offers certain players a powerful stake in the continuance and development of the system.

Metaphor and Metonymy

⁷ Jonathan Charteris-Black, **Politicians and Rhetoric**. *The Persuasive Power of Metaphor*. Houndsmill and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 20.

How does metaphor create new insight, a new understanding? Ricoeur, quoting Black,⁸ uses an example to describe the mechanism: Let our metaphor be “Man is a wolf.” The focus, “wolf,” operates not on the basis of lexical meaning, but by virtue...of the opinions and preconceptions to which a reader in a linguistic community, by the fact that he speaks, finds himself committed....To call a man a wolf is to evoke the lupine system of associated commonplaces. One speaks then of the man in “wolf-language.” Acting as a filter or a screen, “The wolf-metaphor suppresses some details, emphasizes others—in short, organizes our view of man.” In this way metaphor confers an “insight.”⁹

In the study of discourse rhetoricians distinguish between metaphor and metonymy. Schofer and Rice characterize metaphor as a “semantic and referential relationship of *resemblance* made possible by the possession of one or more common features.” The metaphorical processes involve a transfer of meaning. Metonymy, on the other hand, can be characterized by a “semantic and referential relationship of *causality* made possible by the category of semantic feature *cause*. Their definition of metonymy suggests a major limitation of this trope.¹⁰

Sapir proposes that metaphor “states an equivalence between terms taken from separate semantic domains,” such as “George the Lion,” when applied to a football player. Metonymy, according to Sapir, “replaces or juxtaposes contiguous terms that occupy a distinct and separate place with what is considered a single semantic or perceptual domain.” For example, Homer will often be used instead of the *Iliad*: “you will read in Homer.”¹¹ Sapir treats metonymy as the logical inverse of a metaphor. Rather than emphasizing the relationship between two terms taken from different domains, metonymy “emphasizes the whole, the entire domain shared by two terms, and its success as a trope depends upon how fully this idea of wholeness can be conveyed.”¹²

Ontological Metaphors

Lakoff and Johnson argue that our experience with physical objects provide the basis for ontological metaphors, that is metaphors about “being.” For example, we often view inflation as an entity: “We need to *combat inflation*”; “Inflation is *taking its toll* at the gasoline pump;” “If there is much *more inflation*, we will not survive;” “*Inflation makes me sick*.” Viewing inflation as an entity enables us to refer to it, quantify it, identify a particular aspect, see it as a cause, and act with respect to it. Nevertheless, viewing a non-physical thing as an entity does not

⁸ Max Black, **Models and Metaphors**. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962.

⁹ Paul Ricoeur, **The Rule of Metaphor**. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977, p. 87.

¹⁰ Peter Schofer and Donald Rice, “Metaphor, Metonymy, and Synecdoche Revis (it)ed,” **Semiotica** Vol. 21, No. 1/2 (1977), pp. 122-123.

¹¹ J. David Sapir, “The Anatomy of Metaphor,” in **The Social Use of Metaphor**, ed. J. D. Sapir and J. C. Crocker, Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1977, p. 4.

¹² Sapir, p. 20.

allow us to comprehend much about it. To do this, the metaphor has to be elaborated to specify different kinds of objects.¹³

Ontological metaphors like these are so natural that they are usually taken as self-evident, direct descriptions of mental phenomena. We believe the statement, “He cracked under pressure” to be either true or false. The fact that it is metaphorical never occurs to us...and we do not bother to analyze its appropriateness as a metaphor. For example, former Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi described terrorism as follows: “International terrorism is a despicable act that threatens the lives and lifestyles of people all over the world and the peace and security of all countries of the world (8 October 2001).” Here, terrorism, a non-physical thing, is treated as an entity or thing that has an objective reality.

Like inflation, this view of terrorism enables us to suggest how to act. As Koizumi pointed out, we must “...prevent and eradicate international terrorism.” (8 October 2001). Note also here that another metaphor is evoked: “terrorism is contagion” that must be eradicated. As in the case of disease, we must “actively contribute to international efforts to prevent and eradicate terrorism (8 October 2001).” Although the treatment of terrorism as an entity helps us to talk about terrorism, it does little to increase our understanding of the phenomenon or communicate effectively across cultures.

The “war on terrorism” metaphor, like other metaphors used by political leaders, communicates a simple message to the public. The message divides the world with respect to friends and enemies. The message also suggests what is to be done, namely, wage a struggle against an entity--terrorism. However, like the “cold war,” the metaphor suggests little meaning and explains nothing about the phenomenon and its implications.

President Obama

Shortly after his inauguration, President Barak Obama signaled a change in US foreign policy toward the Islamic world in an interview on Al-Arabiya.

In the interview, President Obama focused on the relationship between the United States and Iran. Obama began on a positive note (“Now, the Iranian people are a great people, and the Persian civilization is a great civilization”), but he went on to point out that “Iran has acted in ways that’s not conducive to peace and prosperity in the region...”

¹³George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, **Metaphors We Live By**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

He ended the interview by repeating a line from his inauguration speech: “If countries like Iran are willing to unclench their fist, they will find an extended hand from us.” Thus, for President Obama a HANDSHAKE is a metaphor that has relevance in both business and international relations.

The Cairo Address

In his interview on Al-Arabiya, President Obama promised to “address the Muslim world from a Muslim capital.” Despite the probes of the interviewer, however, the president did not reveal the name of that capital, Cairo.

The Cairo Speech, which President Obama delivered on 4 June 2009, “Remarks by the President on a New Beginning,” was a dramatic meeting with Islam. Almost everything that he said in this speech had an impact that continues to be felt today, because it established a new American paradigm for relating to the Muslim world.

President Obama said that he had come to Cairo to seek “a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect.”

After stating the goal of his address, the President introduced himself to the audience:

Now part of this conviction is rooted in my own experience. I'm a Christian, but my father came from a Kenyan family that includes generations of Muslims.

The message was simple and effective: I am one of you!

The FAMILY Metaphor

One of the dominant metaphors in President Obama's Cairo speech is the FAMILY. In a commencement address at the University of Notre Dame on 17 May 2009, he provided a preview of the idea that the WORLD IS A FAMILY.¹⁴ Despite the growing diversity in the world, including “diversity of thought, diversity of culture, and diversity of belief,” we “must find a way to live together as one human family.”

Less than three weeks later in Cairo, President Obama elaborated the FAMILY metaphor to articulate his vision of the world. The President wants to “focus on the future we seek for our children,” for example, and he imagines “a world where

¹⁴“Remember that each of us, endowed with the dignity possessed by all children of God, has the grace to recognize ourselves in one another; to understand that we all seek the same love of family, the same fulfillment of a life well lived.” Commencement speech at the University of Notre Dame, 17 May 2009.

governments serve their citizens, and the rights of all God's children are respected."

The Doha Speech

It is instructive to compare the Cairo speech with the speech President Obama prepared for the U.S.-Islamic World Forum in Doha, Qatar, on 13 February 2010. In Cairo President Obama greeted the audience with *Assalaamu alaykum*, which was totally unexpected. When he used this greeting, Muslim audiences may have perceived it as an attempt to emphasize with their religion, while American audiences by and large may have perceived the greeting as simply a gesture of politeness. The same words that are spoken can be perceived differently by different audiences, depending on their world views and values. We have argued that this is what happened, when President Bush used the AXIS OF EVIL metaphor in his State of the Union Address.

In Doha President Obama began his remarks with *Assalaamu alaykum*. For Obama this did not sound artificial; on the contrary, with his dark skin and Muslim family background it sounded like the most natural thing in the world to say. At the same time it is very forceful for an American president to say this greeting, because it is a metonym for the whole Muslim World. No leader in Europe could utter these words without sounding somewhat misplaced and artificial. The importance of the credibility of the speaker is underlined in the theory of rhetoric. President Obama has the credibility to utter this greeting. It may be a small thing, but it becomes big when Obama says it. Note that these are the very first words he utters: If came later in the speech it would not have nearly the same dramatic effect.

In his Doha remarks President Obama moved somewhat from an emotional speech form to a more denotative speech form. This speech is more goal-oriented and business-like than in the Cairo address. For example, he talked in detail about "partnering" on education, economic development, science and technology, and global health. He also painted a more precise picture of the enemy: violent extremism and corruption.¹⁵ For President Obama, knowledge is "the currency of the 21st century." This KNOWLEDGE IS CURRENCY metaphor also draws attention to the realm of business and finance.

In his Doha speech, President Obama moved from charismatic rhetoric of Cairo, which he mastered to perfection, to a more pragmatic phase of his presidency, where the discourse become more difficult, because he is more like "everybody else." One might argue that he lost some of his magic in the process. For Bush this was easier, because he had the Image of the opponent to lean on throughout his presidency.

¹⁵"In Afghanistan and beyond, we are forging partnerships to isolate violent extremists, reduce corruption and to promote good governance and development that improves lives."

President Obama and President Bush

The analysis of the “collective mind” of the Obama Administration revealed that a central idea with respect to the Islamic World was the basic semantic integrator, DIFFERENCE WITH BUSH POLITICS. This semantic integrator was an attempt by President Obama and his advisors to refute the political views of the Bush Administration. Nevertheless, in spite of differences in style and outlook, President Obama and President Bush have some perspectives in common; for example, both of them share the histories of the United States.

Both American leaders also make use of religious discourse. President Obama used “a new beginning” three times in Cairo. *Assalaamu alaykum* (peace be upon you) is also religious, of course, and President Obama’s speech in Cairo contains other references to religious texts. Bush’s State of the Union Address reflects his strong moralistic outlook.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the references to “a new beginning” by President Obama and “Evil” by President Bush tell us something about differences in their world views. President Obama used “a new beginning” to make a statement about inclusion. When President Obama speaks to “The Other,” he is a “well-wisher” with an extended hand (HANDSHAKE): “May God’s Peace Be Upon You.” President Bush, on the other hand, used “Evil” to exclude people and distance “The Other,”

A semiotic analysis of “Islamic” is also revealing. Although the signifier is the same for both presidents, the signified for President Obama is a place where he “heard the call of the azaan at the break of dawn and the fall of dusk,” a place that “has given us majestic arches and soaring spires; timeless poetry and cherished music; elegant calligraphy and places of peaceful contemplation.” “Islamic” for President Obama is a sign for a culture with strong traditions that are different from those of the West.

On the other hand, the Islamic world for President Bush is a place that “greeted the fall of tyranny with song and celebration” and consists of “brave men and women” who support “our values.” In other words people in the Islamic world are much like us.

Similarly, “Iran” is a signifier that has a different signified, depending upon the speaker. For Obama, “Iran” is a country that has had a “tumultuous” relationship with the United States, a history that has been a source of tension and mistrust. Although Iran “could lead the world down a hugely dangerous path,” there is still

¹⁶“The Axis of Evil speech marked a shift in Bush Junior’s rhetoric from the NATION IS A PERSON conceptual metaphor to a new metaphor: THE USA IS A MORAL LEADER.” Charteris-Black, p. 176.

the opportunity to “move forward without preconditions on the basis of mutual respect.” For President Bush, “Iran” is a regime that “pursues” weapons of mass destruction, “exports” terror, and “represses” the hopes of its people for freedom. “Iran” for President Bush is a threat, but for President Obama “Iran” presents an opportunity.

Differences in the signified, of course, may reflect contextual factors. In 2002 President Bush was addressing the American people four months after 9/11, while President Obama’s audience was the Muslim world more than seven years later. Furthermore, the concept of “A New Beginning” takes on different meanings, depending on the audience. The implication for the Muslim world is that a better world may emerge. For an audience in the United States, especially a Christian audience, on the other hand, the phrase might suggest being “born again.”

The Challenge for President Obama

One of the challenges that President Obama faces with respect to the Muslim world is to deliver a clear-cut message to multiple audiences who do not share his own cultural, political, and religious traditions. President Bush ignored this challenge, and, as a consequence, found that his message strengthened the rhetorical position of conservatives *vis-à-vis* reformers in Iran.¹⁷

When President Obama gave his address in Cairo, he was talking to the Muslim world. But he also has to keep in mind the American and European audiences, who have different world views and values. This is a big problem for a world leader like President Obama. How do you communicate to audiences abroad and at home without being accused of double talk? Can you talk to all of these audiences simultaneously and run the risk of targeting values, such as “democracy” that are easily “understood” at home but “misunderstood” by audiences abroad?

President Obama faces a similar problem of multiple audiences at home in the United States. His view of the world, and especially his vision of the American role in the world, which he articulated in Cairo, was is not well understood by the traditional foreign affairs bureaucracy in Washington. They tend to see the world from a more “realist” perspective, where the United States as “a hegemonic power will assert itself to thwart challengers to system stability.”¹⁸ High on the list of “challengers,” of course, is Iran.

After President Obama’s speech in Doha in the middle of February 2010, we can detect a change in his approach to the Muslim world in the direction of the traditional foreign affairs establishment. For example, his remarks at the West Point Commencement on 23 May 2010 sound more and more similar to the

¹⁷Heradstveit and Bonham, 2007, pp. 434-438.

¹⁸Heradstveit and Bonham, 1996, p. 279.

speeches of President Bush: "...unlike a terrorist whose goal is to destroy, our future will be defined by what we build. We have to see that horizon, and to get there we must pursue a strategy of national renewal and global leadership. We have to build the sources of America's strength and influence, and shape a world that's more peaceful and more prosperous." In this address, he told the cadets that "we have to shape an international order that can meet the challenges of our generation," including "countering violent extremism and insurgency" and "stopping the spread of nuclear weapons."

A few days later the United States gave a "cold shoulder" to the fuel-swap proposal that was brokered by Turkey and Brazil and formally submitted by Iran to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).¹⁹ According to Gary Sick, this was a big opportunity for the United States to negotiate seriously, but President Obama let it go and supported strong sanctions, instead, which has greatly complicated negotiations with Iran.²⁰

In early June, after the vote of the UN Security Council to sanction Iran, President Obama asserted that Iran had "failed to live up to its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty," while "Iran's leaders hide behind outlandish rhetoric..." According to President Obama, Iran is locked in the past: "As I said in Cairo, for decades the Iranian government has defined itself in opposition to my country. But faced with the opportunity to find a new way forward—one that would benefit its own people—the Iranian government has chosen instead to remain a prisoner of the past."²¹ Here President Obama is using structural metaphors that organize one concept in terms of another, such as structural metaphors associated with *A JOURNEY*: "this isn't *going anywhere*," "our relationship is a *dead end*," and the orientational metaphor, "the future is *forward*."²²

Not understood by the traditional foreign policy establishment and deeply involved in promoting his health care initiatives, President Obama gave up on the strategy of "a new beginning," or at least put it on the back burner, and he began promoting American exceptionalism, competition with China and India, efforts to "defeat determined enemies," and "America's moral example [that] must always shine for all who yearn for freedom and justice and dignity."²³

¹⁹Alastair Crooke, "Secretary Clinton's Cold Shoulder on the Iranian Fuel-Swap Deal," **Foreign Policy**, May 26, 2010

[http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/05/26/secretary_clintons_cold_shoulders_on_the_iranian_fuel_swap_deal].

²⁰ Presentation at "The Iran Challenge: Power, Politics, and U.S. Policy," Asia Society, 10 February 2011.

²¹"Remarks by the President on United Nations Security Council Resolution on Iran Sanctions," 9 June 2010.

²²L. David Richie, **Context and Connection in Metaphor**. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 137.

²³ President Obama's second State of the Union Address, 26 January 2011.

The “Arab Spring,” which began in December 2010 after a street vendor in Tunisia set himself on fire at the headquarters of the provincial government, was a rude awakening for President Obama and his administration, because it sparked efforts to achieve a democratic revolution in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, and Syria. The Arab Spring also gave Obama the opportunity “to mark a new chapter in American diplomacy” and return to the **THE NEW POLITICS OF OBAMA**. In a speech at the US Department of State on 19 May 2011, President Obama recalled his Cairo speech:

And that’s why, two years ago in Cairo, I began to broaden our engagement based upon mutual interests and mutual respect. I believed then—and I believe now—that we have a state not just in the stability of nations, but in the self-determination of individuals. The status quo is not sustainable. Societies held together by fear and repression may offer the illusion of stability for a time, but they are built upon fault lines that will eventually tear asunder.²⁴

He went on to pledge in this speech that “after decades of accepting the world as it is in the region, we have a chance to pursue the world as it should be.” This statement, of course, is a reflection of another basic semantic integrator, **DIFFERENCE WITH BUSH POLITICS**. President Obama made this even clearer when he stated, “Our support for these principles [free speech, the freedom of peaceful assembly, the freedom of religion, equality for men and women under the rule of law, and the right to choose your own leaders] is not a secondary interest. Today, I want to make it clear that it is a top priority that must be translated into concrete actions, and supported by all of the diplomatic, economic, and strategic tools at our disposal.”

The “Arab Spring,” a “season of hope,” has handed President Obama the ability to talk to audiences in the Middle East and North Africa as well as his domestic audience in the United States using the same language and articulating the same values. It has also enabled him to return to a “new beginning” in the Islamic World and begin **A JOURNEY**, once again.

²⁴ President Barak Obama, “Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa, State Department, Washington, DC, May 19, 2011.