



The Long Game: How Obama Defied Washington and Redefined America's Role in the World

Derek Chollet

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In this inside assessment of Barack Obama's foreign policy legacy, Derek Chollet tackles the prevailing consensus to argue that Obama has profoundly altered the course of American foreign policy for the better and positioned the United States to lead in the future.

The Long Game combines a deep sense of history with new details and compelling insights into how the Obama Administration approached the most difficult global challenges. With the unique perspective of having served at the three national security power centers during the Obama years—the White House, State Department, and Pentagon—Chollet takes readers behind the scenes of the intense struggles over the most consequential issues: the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the meltdown of Syria and rise of ISIS, the Ukraine crisis and a belligerent Russia, the conflict in Libya, the tangle with Iran, the turbulent relationship with Israel, and the rise of new powers like China.

An unflinching, fast-paced account of U.S. foreign policy, *The Long Game* reveals how Obama has defied the Washington establishment to redefine America's role in the world, offering important lessons for the next president.

The Long Game: How Obama Defied Washington and Redefined America's Role in the World Details

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From Reader Review The Long Game: How Obama Defied Washington and Redefined America's Role in the World for online ebook

Hank says

Mr. Chollett writes a compelling and common sense explanation of the basis for President Obama's foreign policy, explaining the President's thinking and, yes, dinging the administration he served along the way.

The book provides much coherence about the decisions made by the State and Defense bureaucracies in recent years and it should lead any reader to see that, in fact, Mr. Obama's foreign policy is logical, based on a solid understanding of American history and world affairs, and consistent with American tradition.

Kathleen Cochran says

Hard to read these days. The US's long game is over.

Linda Rogde says

Explained foreign policy decisions made by President Obama in a clear precise readable way. He has taken a longer view of situations and been successful in several key areas- lessening number of chemical weapons and the Iran nuclear agreement while avoiding another major military engagement in the Middle East.

JH says

Interesting to read about some of the thoughts and ideas behind some of America's foreign policy decisions. Unfortunately, because the author was part of Obama's team, there was never a bad thing to be said in the book. "We made the choice that turned out well" "Other choices are risky, and in hindsight decision-making is always easier." "Nobody could predict how things could have turned out if we did so-and-so instead". It is simply too one-sided biased, but some details in the book are still informative, for instance the role of France in Syria, the negotiations with Gaddafi in Libya, Israel's deliberations in the midst of it all, and the parallels drawn with Bush Senior and Eisenhower.

It's surprising how many crisis went on during Obama's term, Russian-Ukraine, Libya, Egypt, Syria, Benghazi. There was no mention of China though, not anywhere in the book, regarding the South China Sea, economies, detainment, or anything else. Which is rather ironic, given how many times the author claimed that "in Obama's term, America has repositioned itself away from Iraq-Middle East towards the Asia-Pacific", but the book is pretty much all-Middle East and minimally Euro-centric.

Dennis Littrell says

Evaluating Obama's presidency from the inside

Chollet is an unabashed supporter of President Obama having served in several senior positions in the current administration. Consequently this is not only an explanation of why Obama did this and did not do that, but a cogent delineation and evaluation of those policies.

Chollet devotes the first chapter to explaining why Obama did not bomb Syria and go after Assad when it was revealed that the dictator used chemical weapons against his own people. Obama has faced an enormous amount of criticism for seemingly doing nothing even though he had drawn a "red line" in the sand. But what his critics don't want to acknowledge and what the general public doesn't understand is that Obama got rid of the chemical weapons through diplomacy, something Chollet asserts could not have been done by using military force. The main point being that the huge stockpiles of chemical weapons were in numerous sites all over Syria, some in populated areas. Experts concluded that blowing up the sites from the air would be hard to do successfully and there would be the danger of the spread of toxic chemical plumes. (p. 12) Chollet quotes Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu as saying that the removal of Syria's chemical weapons was "the one ray of light in a very dark region." (p. 25) The Israelis believed that the chemicals weapons could very well be used against them and they saw no clear way to get rid of them.

Personally I am convinced that Obama handled the chemical weapons horror in the right way, especially since I also read the same explanation in the recently published *Our Separate Ways: The Struggle for the Future of the U.S.-Israel Alliance* (2016) by Dana H. Allin, and Steven N. Simon. But I am not so sure the President has handled the overall problem of Assad correctly. I think getting rid of Assad early on would have clarified the military situation on the ground in Syria and made it easier to defeat ISIS. But, you know, when you are not privy to all the facts it's a little like Monday morning quarterbacking. Although I have an undergraduate degree in political science from UCLA, or especially because of that, I am not sure what was the right thing to do, and indeed judgment in this case should probably be left to the historians. At any rate, I don't think any amount of evidence will convince Obama's critics.

The heart of the book is the idea in the title: "The Long Game." Short term results in foreign policy may result in long term failures, as we recall from the "Mission Accomplished" banner as George W. Bush deplaned on an aircraft carrier during the initial stages of the Iraq tragedy. The long game can be clarified from a "long game checklist" beginning on page 215. The elements are:

- Balance
- Sustainability
- Restraint
- Precision
- Patience
- Fallibility
- Skepticism
- Exceptionalism

Balance. Obama believed that when he entered the White House in 2008 our policies both foreign and domestic were out of balance. We were too much engaged with the Middle East and not enough involved in what was happening in Asia. We were also too much involved with foreign affairs to the detriment of urgent needs at home.

By sustainability Obama means conducting our affairs in such a way as to allow them to be sustained beyond his time in office.

Restraint requires the kind of mentality that does not go off half-cocked or without due diligence. Chollet writes, "Strategy is as much about what one decides not to do" as much as it is about what one does. (p. 220)

Precision "demands specific approaches for particular problems." (p. 221) This sheds light on Obama inclination to use drones against ISIS rather than troops on the ground.

Patience. Yes. Working just for next quarter's earnings report may not be the best long term strategy either as a CEO or as President of the United States.

Fallibility. Yes we are an imperfect nation and we have and will make mistakes. Chollet remarks, "The recognition of fallibility also cautions a leader to exercise power, especially military force, with great care." (p. 224)

Skepticism. We should be skeptical of "quick answers and easy justifications." The quick draw McGraw style of Obama's predecessor is the immediate case in point.

Exceptionalism refers to the exceptionalism of the United States which Obama believes in, but with the emphasis on the tremendous responsibility of being the strongest nation on earth.

I want to say in closing that what I find attractive about Obama's foreign policy is his deep understanding that we, not just as Americans, but as human beings, must move away from the disastrous tribalism that has dominated international affairs since the dawn of history. The knee-jerk resort to the use of lethal force in attempting to solve conflicts must be reconsidered and every effort towards other solutions must be employed. As Obama has said, war must be the last resort.

I enjoyed reading this book primarily because of the insights into the thinking of President Obama that Chollet presented.

--Dennis Littrell, author of "The World Is Not as We Think It Is"

Lindsey says

Turns out I don't love reading about foreign policy. I learned a lot about the nimble decisions that kept us out of war with Syria, but expected more insight into negotiations with Iran. I was not surprised to learn how thoughtful, nuanced and consistent Obama's foreign policy goals are. Would have preferred to read a long magazine article.

Matthew says

A difficult read one month into a presidency that is the polar opposite of Obama's painstaking deliberations.

Chris Eells says

I received an ARC edition of *the Long Game* in return for an unbiased review.

When reading about public figures, especially those still in office, personal bias has to always be taken into account when trying to do a review. At first, I found *Derek Chollet's* first hand accounts a refreshing perspective on the presidency, but I soon found them to be annoying and even irrelevant. I believe that the author did a fair job of presenting the argument that the President has an overriding foreign policy goal and is ardently striving to maintain it. Yet, in only providing first hand perspectives, he fails to develop or show the consequences of enforcing these policies on anyone other than the administration itself. *Chollet* does a fine job referencing all of his quotes and sources... (I find that I will likely read several of the books he referenced) but doesn't appear to make any effort to speak to anyone "on the ground", or for that matter, anyone not in support of the administration's actions/policies.

Finally, one sentence late in the book, glaringly, and perhaps flippantly, showed how biased the author was in regards to the administration and politics in general. Perhaps I am wrong and holding this work to too high a standard, but I thought I was reading an analytical manuscript, not an opinion piece. Just because I agree with most of his opinions doesn't make me like *Chollet's* work.

Alex Lennon says

Very good presentation of the Obama administration's strategies. Welcome view from a thoughtful administration insider.

Chris says

“Strength isn’t narrowing all of your options so all that’s left is the use of force... Strength is using all of our assets—diplomatic, economic, and military—to build a global coalition to solve a problem. Strength is having the confidence, patience and persistence to implement the strategy over many years and in the face of many obstacles.”

Don Heiman says

Derek Chollet's 2016 book "The Long Game" presents an exceptional history of President Obama's foreign policy challenges and successes. The book explains how the President's policies parallel Gawande's infamous "Manifest Checklist's" principles to balance, restrain, and sustain foreign relations in the context of patience and precision. Chollet's long-game discussion also demonstrates how President Obama mirrors George H.W. Bush, Dwight Eisenhower and John Quincy Adams' approaches to foreign relations governance. The book is exceptional.

Bill Zarges says

An aplologia for Obama's foreign policy from an administration insider.....also a challenge to Amerika to eschew the "media-military-industrial complex" and proceed with a foreign policy that encourages strategic thinking and weighing options for the best results to further Amerika's interests as opposed to helter-skelter reactions to the cable news cycles.....
