

Richard N. Haass

The director of a nonpartisan think tank seeks to bring order to a chaotic world

Written by JOHN THOMASON

Richard N. Haass, for 14 years the president of the Council on Foreign Relations, is an information sponge—an encyclopedia of world affairs updated daily, if not hourly. For an unfiltered, nonpartisan peek behind the geopolitical curtain, there may be no Twitter feed worth following more than Haass'. In one representative week last November, he tweeted observations about a leadership crisis in Northern Ireland, political tumult in Germany, Pakistan's history of harboring terrorists, Secretary of State Tillerson's ambitions to downsize the State Department, and the grim future of Egypt following that nation's worst terrorist attack in history.

Even in 280 characters, Haass speaks in complete sentences, choosing his words carefully and wisely, especially the ones with devastating consequences. His missives are rarely upbeat, reflecting a global decline in certainty and stability that is best captured by the title of his latest book, *A World in Disarray*.

That diagnosis is also the name of his lecture at Festival of the Arts Boca, where he'll present problems and solutions and take questions from the audience. If it's anything like his in-depth conversation with *Boca* magazine, Festival audiences are in for an evening of edification and nuance rarely found on prime-time cable news.



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1 How would American foreign relations be different had Hillary Clinton won the presidency?

It's always impossible and fun to play those counter-historicals. In one sense it would probably be the same. She would have had the same inbox initially as Donald Trump. At the top of that inbox would probably have been North Korea.

What would have

been demonstrably different is that Hillary Clinton would have been what I call a foreign policy traditionalist. To use a football analogy, she was playing within the 40-yard line, somewhere around midfield, whereas Donald Trump is not. He's outside the foreign policy mainstream. He would wear that description with a badge of honor; other people would see that as a criticism. My point is simply that she would

have conducted a different foreign policy. Obviously she would have stayed in the Paris climate agreement. She would not have decertified the Iran [nuclear] deal. What you would have had is much more continuity with all of her predecessors, going back to Harry Truman.

2 Speaking of North Korea, politicians on both sides tend to label Kim Jong Un as crazy: Is he really an unhinged maniac?

The honest answer is I don't know, but I think it's counterproductive. Because to the extent he feels threatened, it's going to make him more, not less, likely to hold onto nuclear weapons and develop long-range missiles. So I don't see how threatening and cornering him gets us to where we want to go.

3 Has ISIS been weakened, and if so, should we take some relief from that weakening?

They've been weakened in the territorial sense. They've lost their hold in Iraq, they've pretty much lost their hold in Syria. But ISIS continues to exist. It's melted into populations, it's still active in other parts of the world. So are similar groups, including Al-Qaeda and Boko

Haram. Radical terrorism, whatever name it goes by, continues to be a dangerous threat and will most likely continue to be a dangerous threat, even if it's less strong in Iraq and Syria.

4 What can the U.S. do to create fewer Islamic terrorists?

We need to persuade them that it's a bad career choice. But the real challenge is within their societies, families, communities and governments to delegitimize that kind of action, and to give them political, social and economic opportunities so they will want to work within societies rather than try to destroy them.

5 What is your take on the erosion of party membership in the United States?

I think it's a real statement. Americans increasingly don't believe that either political party represents their interests. In this country and other countries, there's been a real repudiation of traditional mainstream politics, which has often been seen as too concerned with its own self-interest. That's unfortunate, because it makes people increasingly open to radical "solutions" which are not solutions at all.