It is our third year as co-chairs of the Council on Foreign Relations and the list of issues for the institution to address continues to evolve and grow. This year has been marked by persistent financial uncertainty and sovereign debt concerns, as well as by political tensions in various parts of the world, from the Korean peninsula to Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Middle East. Adding to all this, politics in Washington are more polarized than ever. Access to nonpartisan and unbiased analysis is limited yet critical to keeping Americans informed and helping the United States meet its many challenges.

The Council has done tremendous work in New York, Washington, and beyond to address the growing list of foreign policy challenges. There are great strengths to being a New York–based organization. New York is the financial and media capital of the world, and home to the UN headquarters. The convening power of CFR in New York is unparalleled, attracting the most prominent world leaders in government and business.

In Washington, the past year represented the organization’s first full year in its new building. Given the discordant tone of U.S. politics, the time could not be more appropriate for CFR to build its presence in the nation’s capital. The Council’s work grows stronger each year as the institution expands programming and other initiatives in both cities, as well as nationally.

We would like to highlight some of the work CFR is doing from its impressive new space in Washington. The Washington building was an essential step in helping the Council expand both programming for individual and corporate members and outreach to targeted constituencies—congressional, executive, diplomatic, and media. An enhanced presence in Washington is a necessary platform for much of what CFR does.

Since January 2009, the Washington office has welcomed five world leaders—from Canada, India, Liberia, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe—as well as numerous other foreign and U.S. government officials. The Washington office continues to convene senior U.S. government officials and business leaders on an array of issues. It hosted Federal Reserve Chairman Ben S. Bernanke at the height of the financial crisis and also examined economic issues with industry leaders like James W. Owens, chairman and chief executive officer of Caterpillar. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton gave her first major foreign policy speech at the Council in Washington, and CFR recently hosted General David H. Petraeus for a discussion of national security issues. The Council has also welcomed several other officials from the Obama administration to speak on regions ranging from South Asia to Europe and on issues from cybersecurity to education policy and American competitiveness.

The Washington building, with its fifty-nine-thousand square feet and eight stories, far exceeds the Council’s old space, not only in size, but also in technological capacity, which allows CFR more flexibility in programming and other initiatives. This past year during the opening of the UN General Assembly, the Council was able to conduct high-resolution
interactive videoconferences of New York meetings with foreign leaders for its members in Washington. The larger space has also enabled Council fellows to do more in the way of roundtables and study groups, which have increased by 15 percent from fiscal year 2008. In addition, the building was recently awarded a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold-level certification, making it one of the most energy efficient and environmentally conscious buildings in the nation’s capital.

Given the nonpartisan quality of CFR’s work and this country’s ongoing political dissonance, a presence in Washington is not only important to the one-third of its membership based there, but is also vital to the organization as a whole. The Council is well positioned to contribute informed voices to serious policy debates. This is a critical component of the Council’s mission, and as such CFR has expanded its outreach efforts in Washington. The building—which is steps away from the White House, World Bank, and State Department—places CFR in a prominent and easily accessible neighborhood among the most influential persons involved in foreign policy. CFR is also doing more with government officials and policymakers on Capitol Hill and in the executive branch to provide analysis and serve as a resource.

The Congress and U.S. Foreign Policy program has grown significantly over the past decade, elevating the Council’s profile on Capitol Hill. The program puts on meeting series for members of Congress, chiefs of staff, and other senior aides in both the House and the Senate on topics ranging from global health to international finance to nonproliferation. Such series include individual breakfast briefings, in which a new member of Congress chooses a topic and the Council sets up a session with roughly a dozen CFR members with expertise in the area—in fiscal year 2010 the Council hosted fifteen such briefings. Recently, CFR has also hosted meetings that draw on its Contingency Planning Memoranda, which examine the implications of possible scenarios (such as an escalation of Indo-Pakistani tensions) and what can be done about them, and others that focus on more immediate topics like U.S. terrorism trials and the Iraqi elections. The program also now holds a conference at the start of each new Congress to educate incoming senior congressional staff about a wide range of foreign policy issues.

The Council’s executive branch outreach team was formed more than two years ago, before the move to the new building. Thanks to the team’s efforts, the Council in Washington is increasingly viewed as the go-to convening body where senior administration officials and Washington’s intellectual leaders meet for small, ad-hoc briefings on policy issues. This past year, the Council hosted four such sessions—on missile defense, U.S. strategy toward Afghanistan, the Nuclear Posture Review, and the Nuclear Security Summit.

The Council has launched a series of meetings aimed at helping senior embassy officials understand the politics and policies of the United States. The meetings give foreign diplomats access to expert Council members in a private roundtable setting. In the past year, CFR has hosted six of these meetings and connected several dozen senior foreign diplomats with experts on topics like financial regulatory reform, the U.S. economy, and the role of Congress in policymaking. The Council also offers embassy lunches, hosted by foreign ambassadors, for a small group of Council members, helping CFR membership become more familiar with issues significant to foreign governments.

To address the increasing political polarization in the capital, the Council is convening a salon dinner series on bipartisanship. Led by former secretary of state Madeleine K. Albright, former White House
The Council’s work grows stronger each year as the institution expands programming and other initiatives in both cities, as well as nationally.

chief of staff Kenneth M. Duberstein, former House majority leader Richard A. Gephardt, and former congressman Vin Weber, the meetings focus on practical solutions to policy challenges that can garner bipartisan support.

The Council’s programming and initiatives in New York continue to grow more robust as well. Five heads of state or government have visited the New York office this past year—from Georgia, South Korea, Libya, Namibia, and Ukraine—and senior government officials have come from countries including France, the United Kingdom, Thailand, India, Turkey, and Angola, among others. The Council has hosted U.S. senior government officials from the military, the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Reserve System, the Treasury Department, and the State Department, among others. The new CEO Speaker series has featured business leaders from global Fortune 500 companies in finance, energy, telecommunications, and health care. The National Program continues to cater to CFR members located outside New York and Washington, offering more than eighty meetings and nearly fifty teleconferences over the past year in addition to the annual national conference.

Even as CFR continues to build on its nearly nine-decade tradition as a New York–based institution, the Council also works to strengthen its presence in the city where many U.S. policy decisions are made. CFR Vice Chairman Richard E. Salomon and our fellow Board and Council members deserve much credit for all of their guidance and insight on the Council’s Washington efforts and other institutional priorities. We would like to especially recognize Council President Richard N. Haass for his able leadership and persistent efforts to expand the reach of the Council through both traditional means and innovative approaches.

Carla A. Hills
Robert E. Rubin

Co-Chairs of the Board