

MONOCLE

A BRIEFING ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS, BUSINESS, CULTURE & DESIGN

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Obama's
conscience

Harold Hongju Koh
Legal adviser to State
Department, US

Barack Obama has said he is taking "a surgical approach" to altering his predecessor's strategy towards terrorism, and he has left the scalpel largely in the hands of Harold Hongju Koh. In his last job, as dean of Yale Law School, Koh was an eloquent critic of George W Bush's use of detention and torture on suspected terrorists. Now as US State Department legal adviser, Koh – in addition to humdrum work like negotiating embassy leases – has to formulate a new policy to deal with terrorist suspects.

When he was sworn in, Koh said he wanted to be the "conscience to the United

States government with respect to international law". He will have to persuade a client who has so far prized caution over conscience. Obama is behind on his self-imposed, one-year deadline to close the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, and has announced an end to torture but a sequel to Bush's regime of endless detentions and secret trials.

Koh, 55, comes from an accomplished Korean-American family in New England; his father was the first ambassador to the US from a democratic South Korea, and an oncologist brother serves as Obama's chief public health officer. A decade ago, Koh was Bill Clinton's assistant secretary of state for human rights; after leaving government, he focused his scholarship on strengthening cross-border legal frameworks. "The rule of law is like the skeleton of a healthy political system," says Koh. "If you don't have a healthy system, you're not going to have healthy outcomes." Now that may mean stiffening Obama's spine. — SPI

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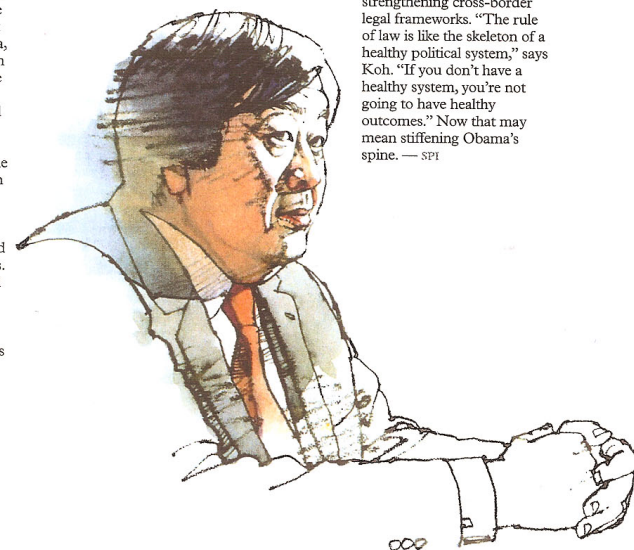
In with the old

Catarina Portas
Retailer, Portugal

While multinational chains pour into Portugal every year to promote new products, independent retailer Catarina Portas plays the contrarian. In 2006, the 40-year-old journalist turned shopkeeper opened A Vida Portuguesa, a Lisbon store that sells forgotten brands from the country's past. The idea came to her while she was doing research for a book on 20th-century daily life in Portugal. "When I started to look at the historic brands, I noticed how quickly they were vanishing," she says. Part social anthropologist, part businesswoman, she scours factories and workshops to stock up on ceramics, foodstuffs and toiletries once commonplace on store shelves.

Keen to revive local crafts, she displays items in their original packaging. "These used to be found in pharmacies and grocery stores. Now they're valued as people want to try and help Portuguese manufacturers."

Her interest in the old also extends to urban planning – she's restored kiosks in central Lisbon that serve traditional beverages and sweets. Some might label her a sentimentalist but Portas argues otherwise. "What I'm doing is tied to identity, not nostalgia, which is very different." Sales suggest she's on the right track as she's opening a second shop, in Porto, and launching an e-commerce site. If we ran Portugal, we'd call on her to help brand the nation. — IC



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