American Foreign and Security Policy under Barack Obama: change and continuity

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Abstract: The main objective of this paper is to analyze how American policies have changed following the inauguration of President Obama. President Obama’s foreign policy is determined by several factors, among them the foreign policy legacy and traditions of the Democratic Party including President Obama’s closest advisors and members of his cabinet (some of them were high-ranking officials of the Clinton administrations), his own foreign policy program presented during the election campaign (which is to a some extent based on his “personal life-story”) developments and reality of the global strategic environment, domestic and international perceptions of American foreign policy and of course, long-term strategic interests of the United States.

Keywords: American foreign policy, American security policy, Barack Obama, Afghanistan, Transatlantic relations, NATO, Iran, strategy, Democratic Party

Influence of the Democratic Party’s foreign policy traditions and impact of Barack Obama’s personal experience and “life story” on current foreign policy.

The foreign and security policy legacy of the Democratic Party is far from being a monolithic construction. One could define several intellectual traditions and their representatives with significant influence on the Democratic mainstream. Liberal and neoliberal, or Wilsonian and partially Jeffersonian traditions are the most important backbones of President Obama’s party’s ideology in foreign policy agenda. The most considerable group within President Obama’s party refers to the legacy of Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Harry Truman. The group has emphasised international institutions and multilateralism as well as democratic institutions and their worldwide expansion – but not by using “hard power” and “regime change”, which were cornerstones of the Bush-doctrine mainly during the first Bush-government. President Obama clearly signalled rupture with Bush’s policy in his Cairo speech: “No system of government can or
should be imposed by one nation on any other” (Cairo, 2009) as well as in Moscow: “America cannot and should not seek to impose any system of government on any other country, nor would we presume to choose which party or individual should run a country” (Moscow, 2009). Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and her associates are prominent representatives of this line of thought in the current administration. “The left wing” of the Democratic Party is characteristic for its scepticism towards the military and its role in international relations. Their voice gained in prominence when the stabilisation of Iraq, in its first years, registered only limited success. This is in contrast to earlier in the decade, particularly shortly after the events of 9/11, when ‘institutional liberism’ enjoyed limited influence in the US and globally.

President Obama has explicitly associated himself with liberal traditions in foreign policy. In one of his first major speeches on foreign policy, at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs on 23rd April 2007, Obama cited F.D. Roosevelt (“we lead the world in battling immediate evils and promoting the ultimate good”) and A. Lincoln (“America is the last, best hope of Earth”) (Obama, 2007, Remarks). He made clear his attachment to the basic principles of Wilsonism (“In today’s globalized world, the security of the American people is inextricably linked to the security of all people”). He stressed the central role of international cooperation, strengthening partnerships and alliances in addressing global threats and challenges and also American moral leadership on a global scale (Obama, 2007, Remarks). President Obama also confirmed the traditional self-perception of the United States as a “lighthouse” and the “force of American example” in his inaugural Address (Obama, 2009, Inaugural Address).

The “Obama-doctrine” was most comprehensively presented in his Foreign Policy article (July/August 2007) “Renewing American Leadership”. After emphasising the legacy of F.D. Roosevelt, Truman and Kennedy, Obama described his basic foreign/security policy philosophy in a classic liberal/Wilsonian way, stressing that security and wealth of Americans are strongly connected with security and wealth of people living beyond the borders of the United States of America (Obama, 2007, Renewing).

Kagan described President Obama’s foreign policy as the most “Wilsonian” since the beginning of 20th century. According to S. Ackerman, a prominent liberal correspondent, President Obama is forcing the narrowest liberal foreign policy positions of the last decades by focusing not only on finishing the (Iraq) war, but also by seeking to finish the way-of-thinking which led to the war.

The president’s philosophy is reflected in his attitude towards the two wars which the USA is recently engaged in. Obama has described the Iraq war as unilateral, pre-emptive and
in violation of basic principles of international law, while holding out the Afghanistan conflict as an example: a war started with UN-approval, in response to direct attack on the United States, and realized in a broader international coalition and in partnership with Europe (moreover in a NATO-framework). In fact, the reason he focuses so strongly on Afghanistan (as opposed to Iraq) is that the conditions, under which the war was launched, dovetail neatly with his basic approach to foreign policy: multilateralist, in strong adherence with international law, (“war of necessity” and not a “war of choice” as it was in the case of Iraq). abhorring use of force unless absolutely necessary. As Obama stated in Cairo, “over seven years ago, the United States pursued al Qaeda and the Taliban with a broad international support. We did not go by choice; we went because of necessity. (Cairo, 2009)“

President Obama described this posture also in his “anti-Iraq-war-speech” delivered in Chicago in 2002: “I don't oppose all wars. After September 11 ... I supported [the Bush] administration's pledge to hunt down and root out those who would slaughter innocents in the name of intolerance, and I would willingly take up arms myself to prevent such a tragedy from happening again.... What I am opposed to is a rash war”\(^1\) (Obama, 2002). He characterized America’s engagement in Iraq as a “war based not on reason but on passion, not on principle but on politics ... without a clear rationale and without strong international support” (Obama, 2002).

It also means that with the reorientation of the U.S. focus from (improper) Iraq wars to the (virtuous) operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Obama government is trying to re-establish the eminence of core Democratic Party’s principles in American foreign policy, notably the multilateral approach, cooperation with allies (especially Europeans), broad international support and UN approval.

President Obama has opted for multilateral solutions over unilaterals in theatres other than Afghanistan: he declared in Moscow (in regard to nuclear weapons reduction) that “If we fail to stand together, then the NPT and the Security Council will loose credibility, and international law will give way to the law of the jungle” (Moscow, 2009).

International cooperation and coalition-building have been key factors in Obama’s chosen approach to Iran or North Korea, as well as to deal with international terrorism. Besides multilateralism, Obama’s approach is also specific for its choice of “other-than-military” solutions, including education, healthcare, support of market economy and

\(^1\) He confirmed this approach also in his article for Foreign Policy: I “will not hesitate to use force, unilaterally if necessary, to protect the American people or our vital interests whenever we are attacked or imminently threatened.” (Obama, 2007, Renewing).
investment in areas of conflict. He and his team are also less focused on traditional threats and emphasize broader social and societal factors, including climate change or poverty beyond the borders of the United States of America (see Inauguration Address) (Obama, 2009, Inauguration Address).

As opposed to the Bush administration’s approach to geographical focus of “war against terror” – Iraq and Afghanistan both are frontlines, but Iraq is the “central front” (NSS, 2006, p. 12) – President Obama’s administration considered Afghanistan as a main theatre of the global struggle. It means that besides Afghanistan as a “substantiation” of “proper” approach to foreign policy there is one more aspect: Afghanistan as a “central front” in struggle against terror. The strategic rationale behind this concept is that Al-Qaeda has its headquarters in Afghanistan not in Iraq, Taliban provided “safe heaven” for terrorist groups and Afghanistan is considered as a permanent source of instability for the whole region which seriously affects American security.

President Obama presented this approach in his pre-election speeches and articles, as well as in his inaugural address and his ”Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan” issued in March 2009. Moreover, he described the termination of military presence in Iraq and reorientation of American focus towards Afghanistan as a sine qua non of re-establishing America’s leadership in the world (Obama, 2007, Renewing).

His acts and speeches are focusing on creating alternatives vis-à-vis the Bush-government almost in all spheres. The emphasis on change was partly driven by his party’s and his own identity and traditions as emphasised above. But president Obama’s personal “life-story” has a significant impact on his foreign and security policy, too. For Obama himself embodies change; it has become his trademark. As the president said in Cairo, “much has been made of the fact that an African American with the name Barack Hussein Obama could be elected President” ) (Cairo, 2009). He has been perceived as an “outsider” in Washington policy although he received his crucial politics-socialisation in Chicago, one of America’s toughest. Another important factor is his commitment to communal activities and work, which made a huge impact on his viewpoints on “high politics”. These socialisation factors are important for representing the “culture of change” in American policy as well as for the necessary tools to realize them. His foreign policy is a combination of Wilsonian idealism and pragmatism.

The liberal foreign policy tradition holds that most countries will cooperate if enough goodwill and confidence exists between them. His openness for a dialogue with “rogue states”, especially Iran is based on this belief. Obama seems convinced that the Iranians’
negative attitude to the U.S. stems from the Bush administration’s approach to Iran. Obama is trying to change the American attitude towards Teheran in the belief that if Iran sees “goodwill” from the American side, it will adjust first its perception of the United States and later its policies towards the country, possibly leading to negotiations and abandonment of the Iranian nuclear programme. In his Cairo address Obama blamed “mistrust and misperceptions” for most problems between the United States and the Muslim world. As Obama stressed, “in order to move forward, we must say openly to each other the things we hold in our hearts and that are too often said only behind closed doors. There must be a sustained effort to listen to each other; to learn from each other; to respect one another; and to seek common ground” (Cairo, 2009).

On the other hand, the Obama’ team’s emphasis on change and alternative foreign policy was driven not only by identity and Democratic philosophy, but also by cold strategic calculations. The decline of America’s prestige and appeal in the word (with some exemptions, like India or Israel) during the Bush era had serious consequences and impact on America’s soft-power. In order to re-establish the United States’s power in its complexity, Obama appears to have concluded, the U.S. must first renew its focus on soft-power.

This is why “change” carries a strategic importance (though Obama mainly uses it to denote a break with the „past“). For President Obama and his team, change is strategy because of its potential to improve American foreign policy potential in a positive way. As stated in Cairo, “9/11 trauma” “led us to act contrary to our traditions and our ideals, we are taking concrete actions to change the course. I have unequivocally prohibited the use of torture ... and I have ordered the prison at Guantánamo Bay to be closed by early next year” (Cairo, 2009).

Fully aware of the huge expectations from the international public opinion as well as the majority of the world’s political elites for establishing a “new way”, the current administration is trying to use the momentum of the positive attitude of world public after the inauguration. Using or responding to these hopes, President Obama’s most important foreign policy goal is to restore American moral supremacy and legitimacy, which were the key themes of his candidacy. The decision to close the prison in Guantánamo Bay and to investigate the CIA’s interrogation methods, as well as prohibition of torture during the interrogations, are steps towards fulfilling the hopes of domestic and international public opinion. They are meant to demonstrate America’s renewed commitment to moral standards and, eventually, to strengthen American prestige and soft-power.
International strategic environment and America’s long-term strategic interests; the case of Iran

Despite strong emphasis on change, President Obama and members of his administration have never challenged the long-term priorities of American foreign policy. These have been constant for decades: securing geopolitical pluralism in key regions of Eurasia (although liberal foreign policy thinking and especially President Obama are very reluctant to use words like “geopolitics” or “strategic interests” and even “interest”), preventing the emergence of rival powers with ambitions of challenging American strategic positions in strategic regions (American and especially liberal answer to rising influence of China is to coopt Beijing onto existing international system), securing the freedom of the world’s basic transport routes including naval communications, and safeguarding access to basic energy sources. These basic interests have been a part of each National Security Strategy, whether written by Democrats or Republicans (although the rhetoric is different).

The policy of change is focusing on modalities how to exercise/secure basic American interests, on instruments and methods, as well as on the global security environment and possible ways of shaping it. The Bush administrations believed that the United States is able to actively shape the future form of global security environment in accordance with American interests by using America’s hard power and strategies like “regime change”, and that it alone possesses the necessary capabilities and sources. On the contrary, the current administration views the US as a leading but not sole power in the international community, and it de-emphasises the use of hard power to shape global security environment. It tries to focus more on influencing the developments in broader international cooperation rather than decisively and forming them alone.

The Obama administration’s approach towards Iran reflects these principles and beliefs. As the president declared in Cairo “There will be many issues to discuss between our two countries, and we are willing to move forward without precondition on the basis of mutual respect” (Cairo, 2009). The focus is on communication with Iran rather than isolation, cooperation rather than threats of using military power or regime-change. President Obama also confirmed the previous basic interest of the United States in connection with the Iranian nuclear program: “But it is clear to all concerned that when it is comes to nuclear weapons, any nation – including Iran – should have the right to access peaceful nuclear power if it complies with its responsibilities under the nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty” (Cairo, 2009). In Prague, the American president declared that “all countries can access peaceful nuclear
energy” but “we need real and immediate consequences for countries which are caught breaking the rules” (Prague, 2009). There is one more factor which is typical for the current administrative: the nature of reactions if the “rules are broken”. President Obama considers “strong international response” as the best reaction if something like that happens – it means he prefers multilateral actions over unilateral reactions in the case of nuclear programs too (Prague, 2009).

The Iranian issue will be one of the most important litmus tests of President Obama’s foreign policy philosophy. The current president has never challenged the most important American interests on the strategic level. It means that the almost one-century old basic strategic interest of the USA – to avoid dominance of concurrent or hostile powers in crucial regions of strategic importance, including the Middle East – is still valid for the entire spectrum of American foreign and security policy elite and relevant experts (of course there are different ways how to reach this goal: from containment of the former Soviet Union to integration of China onto international system). The ultimate goal of America’s policy in the Middle East still remains – stability and preserving local pluralism of influence and power.

While President Obama declared willingness to cooperate with Iran based on common interests, his policy remains expressly focused on the long-term American strategic priorities as described above. Hillary Clinton clearly emphasised it when stated that there are American interests in negotiations with Iran, but there are certain limits (see next section). (Incidentally, she preferred a relatively tougher position towards Iran during the presidential campaign when she declared the necessity of having all possibilities on the table if Iran would ignore its international commitments (Clinton, 2007)).

The broad American strategic interests with regard to Iran translate to this: no Iranian nuclear power and no Iranian dominance. This is all the more true because Israel, the key U.S. ally in the region, categorically rejects a “nuclear-Iran” (it is an existential threat for them, so whatever is the Iranian answer to extreme situation, it is still better than a “nuclear Iran”). For the USA’s other regional (Arab) allies, including Saudi Arabia and Egypt, both developments would ruin their dominant positions in the region.

Iran poses a contradiction for the foreign policy traditions of the Democratic Party; its preferences for reacting to the threats rather than “pre-empting” them, and its emphasis on moral dimensions of foreign policy. It is almost unimaginable that the Iranian leadership would go to a direct military confrontation with the U.S., but Iran is potentially able to reach capabilities and (not only nuclear), which would allow the country to dominate the Gulf even without military confrontation with neighours. So unless the U.S. uses force ‘pre-emptively’,
there is every chance that a regime universally despised in Washington will emerge as a regional hegemon.

**Trans-atlantic relations and NATO**

Arguably, there was no other region with such high expectations and hopes towards the new American administration as Europe. Despite the existing problems, trans-atlantic relations are still crucial for both sides of the Atlantic; politically and economically (though decreasingly militarily). These high hopes were materialized in numerous analyses, recommendations, etc. for Europeans as well as the new Obama government – their common decisive question was how to revitalize the trans-atlantic relations\(^2\). Moreover a significant part of the president’s team consists of “trans-atlanticists” or people with “trans-atlantic pedigree”, including Richard Holbooke and National Security Advisor, Gen. Jim Jones, former NATO supreme commander, who grew up in France. President Obama himself declared his positive approach towards trans-atlantic relations and the Alliance during his Prague speech: besides stressing interest in strengthening NATO, he emphasised the topicality and power of Article V., which has significant and symbolic importance for the whole region of Central Europe (Prague, 2009).

On the other hand, there were concerns in Europe mainly because of President Obama’s strong emphasis on Afghanistan. Some of these concerns prior the NATO Strasbourg-Kehl Summit led to fears that the new American president will put pressure on the European allies to send a significant number of additional troops to Afghanistan. But despite these expectations the Obama administration accepted the European reality – they asked for intensified assistance for Afghanistan, but without strong pressure. The European societies attach far more importance to social issues than to security and in their view, Afghanistan is not directly connected to their security anyway (perhaps with the rare exception of the United Kingdom). They see European presence in Afghanistan as a demonstration of strategic solidarity with the United States. Accepting this situation, the new administration made some half-hearted demands for fresh European forces, but never put strong pressure on the Europeans.

From the U.S. point of view, Europe’s relative importance is in decline. The focus of American foreign policy is moving from Europe towards the Middle East and East Asia. This is a natural development mainly because of the rise of Asian economic and political power,

\(^2\) One of the most significant initiative was the common paper by four prestigious American think-tanks under the leadership of Daniel Hamilton (Alliance Reborn: An Atlantic Compact for the 21\(^a\) Century) (Hamilton, 2009).
and it accelerated during the Bush-era because of the newly opened fronts in Afghanistan and Iraq and the trans-atlantic squabbles during the Iraq war. One of the main factors of that period was the American shift towards unilateralism and the European rejection thereof, as well as of other key principles of the Bush doctrine. While Europe and trans-atlantic relations are one of the most important parts of the Democratic identity and traditions in foreign policy – Secretary of State Clinton characterized these relations as the most important partnerships for America (Clinton, 2007) – eight years of the Bush-era and the realities of global strategic environment have permanently changed trans-atlantic relations.

While during the entire post-Second World War history trans-atlantic relations were almost exclusively about European security, this is not the case anymore. Europe is important for the United States as a provider of military and other kinds of assistance in distant theatres which are important for American security. But European security per se is not a crucial element of American strategic thinking anymore. This development has significant consequences on both sides of the Atlantic. While the current American administration and the vast majority of Europeans find common ground in multilateralism and while they strongly emphasise common civilisational, historic and cultural heritage and interests, Europe has lost its exclusive place in the foreign policy of America. It is still the most important multilateral partner of the United States, but not the only key partner in global strategic issues. Japan or other (mainly Asian) allies are becoming increasingly important, despite the lack of common historical and cultural heritage (at least in the extent as we see it in the trans-atlantic relationship).

The reality is that the first foreign visit of Secretary of State Clinton was to Asia. If one believes in power of symbols in international relations, it was a strong expression where Europe’s place is. If we prefer to focus on declarations or programs, we have to check the foreign policy programs and declarations of President Obama and Hillary Clinton. They called for stronger trans-atlantic relations, but Europe does not have such an exclusive position within their articles and declarations as the “Old Continent” would like to have (Obama, Renewing, 2007, Clinton, 2007).

**Afghanistan/Pakistan**

One of the most visible shifts in American foreign policy after President Obama’s inauguration was the creation of a new strategy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan. As mentioned above, the current president considered Afghanistan as a main security threat and
a primary theatre of global struggle against extremist and terrorist networks during the pre-
election period and confirmed this assessment after his inauguration.

In March 2009, a “new strategy” for Afghanistan and Pakistan was presented (White
Paper, 2009, and Remarks, Afghanistan-Pakistan, 2009). The first important change was the
re-orientation from Iraq to Afghanistan in the Middle Eastern policy, including increased
resources, troops and also attention to the latter theater. The strategic rationale Obama uses
for Afghanistan is similar to that of George Bush’s administration in case of Iraq: Al Qaeda
and its allies are operating from the area, they are using the territory as a safe haven and if the
U.S., its allies and the two regional governments fail to act, terrorists operating from the
territory would jeopardize American and allied security. (For more similarities between
President Obama’s approach to Afghanistan and Bush’s rationale for the Iraq see the end of
this chapter).

One of the most important starting points of President Obama’s strategy is that
Afghanistan and Pakistan should be regarded as one security problem: “The future of
Afghanistan is inextricably linked to the future of its neighbour, Pakistan” (Remarks,
Afghanistan-Pakistan, 2009). The security situation in the region, in turn, affects the safety of
not only the United States by the whole international community. The most important
American goal is “to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and
to prevent their return to either country in the future” (Remarks, Afghanistan-Pakistan, 2009).
In order to achieve this goal, the United States must redirect the necessary resources from Iraq
to Afghanistan and Pakistan, in order to improve the military, economic and governance
capacities of both countries.

After defining the problem and its roots, it is possible to outline the basic principles of
the proposed solution on basis of the Strategy:

- No more “blank checks” for Pakistani and Afghan governments, they need to prove
  their competence and willingness to cooperate. Assistance to local governments will
  be provided conditionally and will depend on progress. The trilateral dialogue among
  the two nations and the USA will strengthen regional cooperation.

- The most important sources of threat being the extremist groups, it is necessary to
  focus on these groups during the fight.

3 In nutshell: succes in Iraq is crucial for American and allied security, the failure means dramatic consequences
for the USA, broader region as well as allies, there are no “silver bullet” solutions for each problem, the solution
is a combination of several approaches and brings significant risks. (President´s Address, 2007).
- The USA will provide assistance to Pakistani and Afghan military and police forces (training, support, equipment) in order to strengthen local capabilities. These, in due time, will relieve American and allied forces, allowing them to leave.

- In the process of providing assistance to local governments, the U.S. will focus not only on the military, but also on the economic and social challenges in the region, because long-term stability and security also requires social development. The American government will seek the support of the international community in providing the necessary help and assistance.

- Support of international organizations and strengthening their role in Afghanistan, as well as “collective action” is very much needed. The clear definition of the role of allies and alliances, mainly the EU and NATO is also very important. The U.S. relies on them because of their ability to contribute to the long-term stabilisation of Afghanistan by military and non-military (training, civilian) capabilities.

- It is necessary to act within a broader international framework and include other regional players in order to stabilize the region. The most important initiative is focus on lowering Pakistani-Indian tension. In the event of success, Pakistani military would be free to redirect its troops and resources to fight against extremist groups in the western and north-western parts of the country. Other players in the region, including Russia and Iran, will be asked to intensify engagement in different forms (permission for transport of military equipment, intelligence informations exchange, communication with certain groups within Afghanistan, etc.).

- Strengthening military presence in Afghanistan (deployment of an additional 17,000 troops), with focus on critical areas in the south and east of the country.

- Enhancing civilian involvement in development activities.

- Enforcing and advocating reconciliation among former local enemies, create common ground for fighting against extremist groups, as well as isolating these groups. As a part of this, the United States will divide its former regional adversaries into two groups: the “hard-liners” (who will need to be destroyed militarily) and those insurgents who fight because they have been bribed or coerced, not because of ideology (these are to be offered incentives for cooperation).

  As mentioned above, there are significant similarities between President Obama’s Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy and George Bush’s last Iraq strategy (presented in 2007). The most important similarities focus on al-Qaeda and extremist groups and their isolation rather than the whole spectrum of potential adversaries, possible cooperation with former
adversaries who are able and willing to cooperate, support of nation-wide reconciliation, strong support for building-up local military and police capabilities in order to strengthen local possibilities and relieve American forces, focus not only on military solutions but also on long-term development projects including economic development, democracy- and institution building, gaining international support including development aid and civilian reconstruction and finally strengthening military, war-fighting presence in critical regions (Obama: additional 17 thousand troops to the east and south of Afghanistan; Bush: additional 21,500 troops to Baghdad and Anbar province).4

However, there are also significant differences. While both strategies incline towards international cooperation and involvement of international organisations, allies and partners, there is a totally different approach towards certain regional players. George Bush considered regional rivals of the United States, namely Iran and Syria, as a source of problem in Iraq and tried to isolate them. President Obama on the other hand is seeking cooperation with everybody, including Iran. His special envoy for Afghanistan/Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke expressed the need for direct negotiations with America’s regional rivals, including Iran, arguing with historical precedent during the war in Vietnam (Holbrooke, 2008).

The next significant difference is the degree of involvement of allies. While Bush failed to secure much support, owing to Europe’s rejection of the arguments for the war, Obama has had much more success keeping Europe engaged in Afghanistan (though not with as many forces as the U.S. would like to see).

Conclusions

The idea of building a “nuclear-free-world” perfectly demonstrates the basic principles of the current American foreign policy; a combination of idealism with pragmatism grounded in (long-term) U.S. strategic considerations. The goal of ridding the world of nuclear weapons is more idealistic than realistic, as Obama himself admitted (“This goal will not be reached quickly – perhaps not in my lifetime”, he confesses in Prague) (Prague, 2009). But the campaign to reduce nuclear weapons and sign a new agreement with Russia is one of his most important moves on the strategic level, and it is highly pragmatic. As such, it is also illustrative of Obama’s broad foreign policy philosophy.

4 It is necessary to mention that one can find these similarities only with the last Iraq strategy of George Bush presented in 2007, while American steps immediately after invasion in 2003 were made in different way (dissolution of Baath Party and Iraqi armed forces, lack of cooperation with former representatives of Saddam regime, even in lower or local levels, etc.) and US strategy was modified only after limited success with stabilisation of Iraq in following years.
The initiative is based on three basic factors. First, the global strategic reality makes it possible to reduce the strategic forces without compromising American security; this allows the U.S. to reorient resources to other security priorities\(^5\) (though the American president also confirmed that “As long as these weapons exist, the United States will maintain a safe, secure and effective arsenal to deter any adversary, and guarantee that defence also to our allies”) (Moscow, 2009). Second, the idea of reducing nuclear weapons has been very well received worldwide, so the campaign as such will strengthen the U.S. image as “dove” (in contrast to the „militaristic“ image of his predecessor). Third, it also corresponds with the security policy identity of a liberal foreign policy establishment, which emphasizes the moral aspects of foreign policy, including the “responsibility to act”.

Based on several sources and factors – steps made by the new American president during his first months in office, his foreign policy and security programs, legacy and traditions of the Democratic Party and the liberal political elite, global strategic situation and international situation as well as the U.S. long-term strategic interests – one could describe President Obama’s foreign and security policy as a complex of several mutually related factors.

- Change: moral and ideology/legacy-driven background, which also uses the positive momentum immediately after his election and inauguration, as well as the huge (global) expectations to change the perception of America in the eyes of domestic as well as world public. A clear gap with the Bush-era also underlines the concept of change, which is considered as something more than just “ordinary” retouch/mutation: it has deeper significance with hopes of changes at a strategic level by restoring America’s prestige and moral superiority. It leads towards re-establishing the elements of an American soft-power in international relations.

- President Obama’s approach towards foreign policy and international security includes the most important elements and traditions of Democratic Party and liberal elite, from liberal and neoliberal traditions, to left-wing and “centrists” as well as followers of the Wilsonian tradition.

\(^5\) The process of reorientation of available sources is broader than just reduction of nuclear forces. The main rationale is to terminate or reduce military and weapon programs which have limited usability in the current strategic situation and reinforce projects and development programs with highest relevance in recent operations, especially Afghanistan and partially Iraq. These trends were included into the basic principles of creating the next military budget which was presented by Defence Secretary Robert Gates this spring. It also includes cut-downs and/or reductions of weapon systems tailored for large-scale inter-state military conflicts between great powers, with F-22 Raptor as one of the most prominent examples.
- While President Obama reserves the right to use hard-power in cases where U.S. absolute strategic interests are at stake, in general he has made a significant shift from the traditional operations and threat-perceptions towards more social and societal issues, including problems like global poverty and climate change.

- He is emphasising the multilateral approach in international relations – but in accordance with American foreign and security policy traditions he never excluded unilateral steps when they are absolute necessary – and “renewing” traditional partnerships of the USA, including transatlantic relations.

- The perception of the Obama administration as totally anti-militaristic is false – he has never mentioned that he will not fight if it is necessary to protect American security or interests. However, he reoriented America’s priorities from Iraq (“war of choice”) to Afghanistan/Pakistan (“war of necessity”), in accordance with his and his party’s legacy.

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