



RESEARCH PAPER

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Barack Obama's foreign policy what can NATO expect from the next U.S. President?

by Patrick KELLER¹

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1. Introduction

Barack Obama was elected to the presidency of the United States on the promise of “hope” and “change.”² Although somewhat vacuous, these promises worked because the people in America – and across the globe – overwhelmingly long for an end of the Bush era which stands for wrong wars (or at least wars gone wrong), hubris, and an overall decline of U.S. economic power, political influence, and moral standing. All presidents seek to leave their lasting imprint on foreign affairs, their doctrine. Most of them, however, merely oscillate between continuity and change: in the absence of major interfering events such as 9/11, institutional inertia, political constraints, and the wisdom of tradition most often push presidents to maintain the status quo while only tinkering with the edges. Revolution, in democratic systems, is a very slow process.

Given his lack of legislative achievements and specific policy programs, it is fair to assume Obama as well will bring change only in incremental steps, if at all. At the same time, from the perspective of NATO, American leadership is at a premium. Shortly before its 60th birthday, the alliance proves its vitality by cultivating its perennial crisis. Indeed, the magnitude of the tasks ahead is not to be belittled: a new strategic concept is to be produced; the situation in Afghanistan requires a better strategy (or at least much more resources and mobilization of political will and ally solidarity); a consensus on the role of NATO under conditions of globalization and international power shifts must be rebuilt; the future of NATO enlargement must be decided upon



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NATO Defense College
Research Division
Via Giorgio Pelosi, 1
00143 Rome – Italie

web site: www.ndc.nato.int
e-mail: research@ndc.nato.int

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00012 Guidonia - Rome - Italie

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¹ Dr. Patrick Keller is the Coordinator of Foreign and Security Policy at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Berlin, Germany. The views expressed in this paper are the responsibility of the author and should not be attributed to the NATO Defense College or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

² Many thanks to Andreas Schulze for helping me research this paper.

and, where appropriate, implemented. And these are just the first, mutually reinforcing, challenges facing NATO in general and the next U.S. president in particular that come to mind.

Obama's most important task with regard to NATO is to define the *raison d'être* of the alliance. This is something every president must do, precisely because NATO's *gestalt* has been so much in flux over the last few years. NATO is, simply put, currently well into its "third phase." The first phase from its founding until the end of the Cold War was characterized by NATO's deterrent capability. In its second phase, NATO found its major purpose in creating a Europe whole and free by stabilizing the emerging free-market democracies in Central and Eastern Europe through enlargement. The third phase, starting with 9/11 (or maybe even the Kosovo war), is characterized by NATO's missions out of area. Each new phase provided a new *raison d'être* for NATO without discarding the previous one. As a result, NATO's self-definition today is more complex than ever, with competing narratives that sometimes are conflicting. Therefore, Obama must articulate a clear understanding of the purpose of NATO and his vision for its future in order to ensure the alliance's success.

Since he has not done so yet, it is the aim of this paper to deliver first clues as to what priorities and attitudes might shape the security policy of President Barack Obama. These observations rest mainly on Obama's speeches and record, the policy statements of his presidential campaign, and the assessment of his advisers. Evidently, two caveats are necessary. The first one was formulated almost euphemistically by Richard Holbrooke: "It is a well-established historical fact that what candidates say about foreign policy is not always an exact guide to what they will do if elected."³ The second caveat is that Obama campaigned almost exclusively on domestic issues. Of course, in contrast to Clinton in 1992, the circumstances did not allow him to avoid topics of foreign affairs altogether, but with the situation in Iraq steadily improving, Obama lost his major issue. In fact, most observers agree that Obama could beat John McCain exactly because foreign affairs were not a hot

topic anymore on Election Day: When the financial crisis broke, McCain and Obama were even in the polls, but within a few days, Obama gained a ten percent advantage which he defended over the remaining three weeks.⁴ Accordingly, his domestic agenda of economic stabilization and social reform will be his priority.

However, foreign policy never lets an American president go. To find out what direction Obama is likely to take, this paper will first place Obama's basic conception of international relations in the context of post-Cold War American foreign policy. In a second step, Obama's most important advisers and possible figureheads of the Obama foreign policy team will be introduced. The third part will then comprise an analysis of Obama's position on specific issues with relevance to NATO such as Afghanistan, the relationship with Russia, and nuclear proliferation. The sum of these pieces will hopefully allow a first impression of what effect the incoming Obama administration will have on NATO and international security politics.

2. Obama's Conceptual Framework in Historical Context

Since Obama's policies are going to be shaped in reaction to those of his predecessors, it is worthwhile taking a quick look at them. Interestingly, the three U.S. presidents who occupied the Oval Office since the end of the Cold War have all taken very distinct positions on what the American approach to world affairs in the post-containment age should be.

George Bush Sr. was the advocate of realism. He thought in terms of national interests, great powers, and balance. As a result, he was the custodian of the status quo, ridiculing "the vision thing." The U.S. should maintain its new status as sole superpower but it should seek to use that power with the utmost reluctance as it might only cause backlash and eventual loss of status. Accordingly, Bush fought the Gulf War to liberate Kuwait and restore the status quo ante, but he did not topple Saddam to reinvent the political dynamic of the Middle East. Similarly, he did not intervene in the Balkan war for there was no

³ Richard Holbrooke, "The Next President: Mastering a Daunting Agenda", in: *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2008.

⁴ See the daily average of polls at www.realclearpolitics.com

immediate U.S. interest at stake. As then-Secretary of State James Baker said, “We don’t have a dog in that fight.” The realist approach is clear in Bush’s attitude towards the future of NATO, too. Many were calling for the dissolution of this anachronistic instrument of Cold War strategy, while others already thought ahead, fantasizing about enlargement and a broader, global role. The realist rejected both options, saving the status quo and avoiding any provocation of the still-great power Russia.

Bill Clinton followed the principles of liberal internationalism. To him, peace was indivisible and could not be achieved in great power concerts alone: “Globalization” was the buzz word of the decade. Accordingly, he pursued a strategy of global entwinement and interdependence by signing an unprecedented 270 bilateral trade agreements and creating or reviving institutions and agreements such as NAFTA, the WTO, APEC, and others. It was a “the hub controls the spokes” - strategy since all of these diverse compacts had one thing in common: a leading role of the United States. At the same time, Clinton was not shy to use American hard power, especially in the context of humanitarian interventions on the Balkans, in Somalia, and elsewhere. In sum, Clinton deployed American forces more often than any other president in U.S. history, including George W. Bush. This same liberal internationalism also drove Clinton’s policy of NATO enlargement and its first out-of-area mission. Clinton’s “strategy of engagement and enlargement”⁵ called for expanding the community of free-market democracies, peacefully transforming those reluctant to join the club, and isolating those who threatened that community – Clinton’s NATO policy served all three purposes.

Against this backdrop of Clinton’s liberal globalism, George W. Bush started out in the realist mold of his father, promising a more “humble nation.” Under the impression of 9/11, he switched gears to a neoconservative approach combining a readiness to use military force and a revolutionary vision of an international system transformed that seemed most promising to protect the U.S. from a similar

attack both in the short and in the long term. In Bush’s analysis, the root cause of terrorism is not poverty or religious fanaticism, but the social, political, and economical disenfranchisement of whole generations, especially in the Broader Middle East. In short: a lack of freedom. Hence, he aimed for a long-term policy of liberation and political reform that was to be kick-started by a policy of regime change in Iraq. Simultaneously, the U.S. had to counter immediate threats of international terrorism and its connection with possible state-sponsored proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. All of the controversial methods of the Bush administration, from preemption to unilateralism, follow from this twin imperative. The same logic drove the Bush administration’s push for further NATO enlargement as they saw the alliance as a “league of democracies,” designed to serve U.S. security interests by stabilizing and expanding the political sphere of the West.

This rather rough outline demonstrates that each major American school of thought in international relations had a shot at practical implementation since the end of the Cold War: realism under Bush Sr., liberal internationalism under Clinton, and neoconservatism under Bush Jr. All of the presidential candidates had to position themselves somewhere within that spectrum.⁶ John McCain basically offered a continuation of the Bush worldview under conditions of reduced U.S. power and freedom of action – call it “neoconservatism light.” Barack Obama ran as a liberal internationalist, following in the footsteps of Bill Clinton. As the next two sections on his advisers and on specific issues will show, there has been little variation from this creed in Obama’s campaign. The international scenery, however, is much different from the 1990s – America is bogged down in two wars, the economy is shaken, there is at least one strong challenger to American primacy (China), and America’s moral authority is in shambles. In reaction to that, Obama’s liberal internationalism will differ in at least three respects from that of the Bill and Hillary Clinton brand.

First, Obama rejects the War on Terror as the overarching paradigm of American foreign policy. In contrast to many Democrats, including the

⁵ The White House, A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement, Washington, D.C., July 1994.

⁶ With the exception of blatant isolationist such as Democrat Dennis Kucinich and Republican Ron Paul, who never had a serious chance to gain the nomination.

Clintons, he never bought into the idea that international terrorism was not only a major challenge to American security but the first post-communist foe to which all issues of foreign policy could be related. This was one reason why he, again in contrast to most senior Democrats, opposed the Iraq War from the beginning. Obama acknowledges the threat posed by international terrorism: “To defeat al Qaeda” he intends “to stay on the offense everywhere from Djibouti to Kandahar.”⁷ But he sees the fight against terrorism neither as primarily a military challenge nor as the encompassing challenge of the day. Instead, he puts emphasis on strengthening moderates in the Islamic world and on restoring America’s moral leadership by closing down Guantanamo as soon as possible and supporting a multilateral approach to counter climate change.

Second, Barack Obama will not govern in an age of unipolarity, and he acknowledges it. One can leave the debate over the true nature of the international system – uni-multipolar, non-polar, etc. – to the academics. The fact is that Obama is faced with a relative decline in America’s political influence and that most of the pressing problems in international affairs cannot be solved by the U.S. alone. They can, however, not be solved without the U.S. either. The result will probably be a pragmatic multilateralism on Obama’s part – similar to what Bush tried in his second term. Bush was eventually unsuccessful because he had lost most of his partners’ good-will, but his honeymoon with the international public will put Obama in a different position.

Third, unlike the New Democrat Bill Clinton, who moved his party towards the center on a range of political issues, Barack Obama is a much more traditional liberal in the American sense of the term. This is particularly evident in his position on free trade. Especially during his primary run but also during the general election campaign, Obama oftentimes advocated protectionist measures to protect American jobs and save the U.S. economy from adverse effects of globalization. This is very much in line with congressional Democrats, the history of the

party, and Obama’s overall platform favoring a strong state. Should U.S. enthusiasm for free trade slacken under President Obama would that be a problem in itself, but it would also affect NATO’s larger strategic outlook. Because in its broadest sense, NATO today is the protector of globalization. By defending its constituting free-market democracies and projecting security and stability in critical regions of the world NATO simultaneously drives and protects the process of modernization and liberalization. If Obama emphasizes the dangers of globalization over its benefits – as he does in his narrow and nationalistic position on free trade – this spells significant difficulties for “phase three NATO” and might even play into the hands of those who seek a less internationalist United States. It would be ironic if Obama, given his heritage, biography, and immense international popularity, ended up feeding the isolationist impulse in America.

3. Obama’s Foreign Policy Team

Barack Obama’s experience in foreign policy is limited. As was often pointed out during his campaign, Obama chaired the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on European Affairs (dealing, for instance, with matters of NATO, the EU, and the OSCE) since January 2007. Under his chairmanship, however, the committee did not meet once to discuss policy issues, and Obama did not undertake a single trip to Europe during his tenure. Thus, as with previous presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton, the circle of Obama’s foreign policy advisers rises to special importance.

At the time of this writing, none of the major foreign policy positions of the prospective Obama administration have been filled yet. Moreover, the list of the Obama campaign’s foreign policy advisers was famously crowded. Nonetheless, some surrogates, officials, and supporters distinguished themselves with such frequency, that a first overview of the voices influencing Obama’s foreign policy-making is possible.⁸

As a general tendency, many foreign policy experts from the Clinton era are associated with

⁷ Barack Obama, *Renewing American Leadership*, in: *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2007.

⁸ For further information on Obama’s foreign policy advisers, see a recent report of the Council on Foreign Relations: http://www.cfr.org/publication/16188/foreign_policy_brain_trusts.html

Obama as well. Given the elite nature of the foreign policy establishment of both parties in and out of government, this is not unusual. It is interesting insofar as that Obama is generally seen as a more liberal Democrat than Bill Clinton was; at least in the area of foreign policy, this “ideological” difference will probably turn out to be rather small. The appointment of Rep. **Rahm Emanuel** (D-Ill.) as Obama’s White House chief of staff is a hint that (centrist) Clinton operatives will play an important role in the Obama administration.

Obama’s most experienced foreign policy adviser is **Anthony Lake**, who was National Security Adviser to Bill Clinton during his first term and who has since been a professor at Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service. Lake is one of the most distinguished and most idealistic of the Democratic Party’s foreign policy operatives. As a young Foreign Service officer, he held posts in Vietnam and became an aide to National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger in 1969 but quit the NSC in protest of Nixon/Kissinger’s widening of the war to Cambodia. In the Clinton administration, he was the principal author of the Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement⁹ and one of the leading advocates of U.S. humanitarian interventions on the Balkans, in Somalia, and elsewhere. In his subsequent books and public statements he argued in favor of a robust liberal American internationalism, calling for unilateral intervention in Darfur, further enlargement of NATO, and a more comprehensive effort of state-building in Afghanistan. He is an enthusiastic supporter of the “Obama Doctrine” of entering direct diplomacy with America’s adversaries such as Iran. Among the Democratic foreign policy elite, he was one of the earliest and most outspoken critics of the Bush administration’s war against Iraq. Lake is rumored to be on the National Security Adviser and Secretary of State short lists but is most frequently mentioned as the next Director of the CIA – a job the Republican Senate denied him during the second Clinton term.

Susan E. Rice is a Brookings Institution senior fellow for foreign policy, global, economy, and

development. In the second Clinton term, she served in the NSC and as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. She is currently on the advisory board of the Obama-Biden transition project. She also has been a vocal proponent of humanitarian missions, particularly on Darfur, and urged NATO and the African Union to embrace the international norm of the “responsibility to protect.” The fight against global poverty is, according to Rice, one of the greatest security challenges. She is considered for the post of National Security Adviser.

James B. Steinberg is the Dean of the LBJ School of Public Affairs in Austin, Texas, and has been a fellow at various institutions including Brookings and RAND. In the Clinton administration, he served as head of the policy planning staff at the State Department (first term) and Deputy National Security Adviser (second term). He was, alongside Dennis Ross, the principal author of Obama’s most expansive foreign policy speech during the campaign, emphasizing the need for a multilateral approach to international affairs, the importance of international institutions, and the engagement of enemies through negotiations.

Denis McDonough was the National Security Coordinator of the Obama campaign. Before that, he was a national security adviser to Senator Tom Daschle (D-SD) and a fellow at the Center for American Progress. His main field of expertise is energy and environmental policy, and he is particularly outspoken on the need for significantly reduced emissions of greenhouse gases in the U.S. and the promotion of a clean energy sector. He is also an advocate of a clear, near-term deadline for U.S. troop withdrawal from Iraq in order to save money that could be put to better use in solving the current economic and financial crisis.

Mark W. Lippert was Obama’s senior foreign policy staffer in the Senate and, alongside McDonough, Obama’s only day-to-day foreign policy aide during the campaign. Before that he worked for the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee, for the Senate Democratic Policy Committee, and as an

⁹ See footnote 4.

aide to pacifist Democratic Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont. The Navy reservist did a tour of duty in Iraq in the spring of 2007 and has had a hand in all of Obama's major foreign policy speeches.

Dennis B. Ross is a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and was one of the central architects of U.S. Middle East policy in the Bush Sr. and Clinton administrations. As Clinton's chief negotiator he prepared and accompanied the Camp David II talks; in his subsequent statements and books he put the blame for the ultimate failure of these negotiations squarely on the shoulders of the Palestinian side. Ross is Obama's most experienced adviser on the Middle East and was a co-author of Obama's speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in June 2008, which is widely recognized as Obama's most expansive statement on his foreign policy vision.

William J. Perry is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and a professor at Stanford University. From 1994 to 1997, he served as President Bill Clinton's Secretary of Defense, overseeing U.S. military action in Bosnia and Haiti. He was also instrumental in establishing NATO's policy of enlargement and negotiating the nuclear issue with North Korea. Since leaving office, he has become one of the most outspoken proponents of nuclear disarmament. As a member of the Iraq Study Group, he saw no possible military solution in Iraq and called for a complete troop withdrawal by early 2008.

Sarah Sewall is the Director of Harvard University's Carr Center for Human Rights Policy and a lecturer at the Kennedy School of Government. During the Clinton administration, she was the first Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Assistance. Her main expertise is at the crossroads of national security and humanitarianism. Having collaborated with General David Petraeus to rewrite the Army and Marine Corps counterinsurgency field guide, she criticized the "surge" for deploying too few capable forces.

Another name frequently mentioned is the one of General (ret.) **James L. Jones**, NATO's former Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR). He combines four-star résumé and bipartisan admiration. His nomination would be an important signal to NATO as he knows the mechanisms of the Alliance and was highly respected among the member states.

These are the advisers and operatives who helped shape Obama's campaign and transition and who are likely candidates for influential jobs in the Obama administration. In addition, there are a number of prominent figures who – because of their political standing rather than their previous work for Obama – are likely candidates for top jobs especially in the departments of state and defense. With particular regard to State, these names include **Richard Holbrooke**, **Ron Asmus**, and **Hillary Clinton**. As a former Assistant Secretary of State, UN ambassador, and broker of the Dayton Peace Accords that ended the war in Bosnia, Holbrooke is a foreign policy heavyweight of the Democratic Party. His political independence and leadership style, however, have created doubts about him as a possible Secretary of State. Since the end of the Cold War Ron Asmus has been the most unrelenting advocate of NATO enlargement – his selection as a major official in the State Department would send an unmistakable signal. He is currently the Executive Director of the German Marshall Fund of the United States in Brussels. At the end, Obama asked Hillary Clinton to serve as Secretary of State. This appeared primarily a political move, unifying the party and tying a potential challenger of 2012 closer to the administration. That, of course, completed the picture of a renaissance of the (Bill) Clinton years in U.S. foreign policy.

With particular regard to Defense, three Republicans are most often discussed as possible choices for Secretary: **Robert Gates**, **Richard Lugar**, and **Chuck Hagel**. It is likely that Obama, in a gesture of national unity and bipartisanship, will appoint at least one Republican to the most prestigious foreign policy jobs. Current Secretary of Defense Robert Gates' handling of the Iraq war and his inclination to make Afghanistan the central front of the American war on terror have earned the respect of Democrats as well. In a time of difficult transitions in foreign and security policy it might also be useful to maintain a degree of continuity at DoD – at least for a while. Senators Lugar (Indiana) and Hagel (Nebraska) are attractive choices for similar reasons: both are distinguished members of the Foreign Relations Committee (Lugar having been its chairman for six years), and both challenged party orthodoxy when they turned highly critical of Bush's policy in the immediate aftermath of the Iraq war. Both are among the most knowledgeable U.S. legislators when it comes to NATO and the transatlantic partnership. Lugar in particular has been at the forefront of the political

and strategic development of NATO for decades – especially in matters of enlargement, energy security and the re-interpretation of NATO’s mission.

4. Issues in Transatlantic Security Policy

It is difficult to predict with any specificity what course Obama’s foreign policy will follow. From Obama’s campaign statements and the views of his advisers, however, a few positions and attitudes can be inferred. Still, the following list excludes major issues such as the U.S.-China relationship on which Obama did not formulate any policy vision beyond the usual campaign banalities.

Afghanistan

To Obama, Afghanistan is the central front in the war on terror, whereas Iraq is only a sideshow. Moreover, according to Obama, the outcome of the Afghanistan mission will determine the status, strategy, and credibility of NATO for years to come. Thus, Obama promised to send an additional 7,000 to 10,000 American troops to Afghanistan (mostly redeployment from Iraq). He also repeatedly announced that he would lean on other NATO allies to increase their financial and military commitments and to soften their national caveats. Obama also stated that he would pressure Pakistan into stopping the influx of Taliban guerillas to Afghanistan, pondering American military action on Pakistani territory. Through a comprehensive approach of civil-military cooperation, Obama ultimately aims to enable the Afghan police and military forces to pacify their country on their own.

NATO

Obama emphasizes NATO’s indispensable role in bringing Europe and the U.S. together and providing security and stability for the transatlantic area – by sometimes projecting stability beyond the Alliance’s borders. His election platform suggests a reform of NATO institutions and practices, including the reduction of caveats, granting greater flexibility to NATO commanders in the field, and streamlining the decision-making process. Obama is supportive of a strong European security and defense as long as it is not designed to compete with NATO structures. He is also an advocate of further NATO enlargement, although he is expected to be more open than Bush to consider allies’

doubts about the practicality and implications of NATO enlargement to states involved in unresolved territorial conflicts. On a more general note, Obama wants to increase and modernize the U.S. armed forces. He backs plans for an additional 65,000 army troops and an additional 27,000 marines. He is also aiming for more specialized, smaller units for quick deployment in asymmetrical warfare.

Russia

To Obama, Russia is neither friend nor foe, but a great power to be engaged in a constructive and pragmatic dialogue. On the other hand, Obama plans to encourage Russia to move towards more democratic openness and transparency. This ambivalence is typical of Obama’s stance on Russia: During the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008, Obama at first called on both sides to use restraint and cease the violence before – hard pressed by the McCain campaign and public opinion in the U.S. – he focused his criticism on Russia’s aggression and unlawful occupation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Long before Russian president Medvedev greeted Obama’s election by announcing Russian plans to deploy short-range missiles near Poland, Obama was on record as skeptical about the U.S. missile defense system in Europe, citing technical challenges and the unnecessary provocation of Russia. At the same time, Obama calls for a new energy policy reducing dependence on Russian oil and gas in order to minimize Russian political leverage over Europe. (This fits into his broader energy / anti-climate change policy which rests on a combination of energy conservation, extending alternative and renewable energy, and nuclear power.) Moreover, Obama and his likely administrative appointments strongly support NATO-enlargement which might lead to severe frictions with Moscow in the coming years – particularly if it comes to Ukraine.

Iraq

Obama opposed the Iraq war from the beginning. He also opposed the “surge” and General Petraeus’ new counterinsurgency strategy, belittling its positive effects well into the year 2008. The Vice President-elect, Joe Biden, has repeatedly stated that the only solution for Iraq is the partition of the country along ethnic lines. Against this backdrop, the increasingly good news from Iraq is a true present to the incoming administration because Obama might be able to

fulfill his campaign promise of a complete U.S. troop withdrawal from Iraq by 2010. By then, the Iraqi security forces might actually be able to bear most of the burden, especially if Obama follows through on his plan to push for further consolidation of the political system in Iraq.

Iran

Just as Bush and McCain did, Obama declares it “unacceptable” for Iran to have nuclear arms – or a Uranium enrichment program. In contrast to the Republicans, however, he is willing to enter direct, top-level negotiations with the Iranian leadership in order to prevent a nuclear Iran. It remains unclear what exactly Obama plans to offer in such negotiations that could have the desired effect. Obama does not rule out military strikes should Iran not comply – but he frequently pointed out that many more diplomatic roads should be explored before this last resort can be considered.

Nuclear proliferation / disarmament

During his campaign, Obama called for the strengthening of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and promised to halt the development of new nuclear weapons in the U.S. He also endorsed the Kissinger/ Perry/Nunn/Shultz initiative regarding a complete worldwide nuclear disarmament. However, there is much reason to doubt that this vision will be a priority of President Obama as well.

Arab-Israeli Conflict

Obama had trouble during his campaign to present a coherent stance on the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular. Headlines that he was the preferred candidate of Hamas alternated with his muddled comments on whether Jerusalem was to be an undivided city or not. Obama declared Israel’s security the incontrovertible first priority of U.S. Middle East policy, but criticized the Israeli settlements in the West Bank. At bottom, however, Obama’s platform does not digress much from the policy of George W. Bush in Annapolis: In favor of a two-state solution, calling for a U.S.-brokered peace treaty, and against a prominent U.S. role in implementing such a treaty. In any case, Obama will engage Syria much more directly in the process.

5. Conclusion

Reading the political tealeaves, it is reasonable to expect President Barack Obama to pursue a foreign policy of liberal internationalism. As in the Clinton years – and with much of the personnel of the 1990s – the emphasis will be on institution-building and the engagement of partners and opponents alike. For NATO, this means three things: First, a push for further enlargement, but without the harsh rhetoric and ideological zeal of the Bush administration. Second, an increased effort to bring the OEF and ISAF mandates in Afghanistan to success. Third, a sustained U.S. campaign to define NATO as a global security provider, especially in the context of humanitarian interventions.

In contrast to the Clinton years, Obama has to restore U.S. standing in the world and to manage a relative decline in U.S. power. The effects of these conditions will be particularly evident in how the U.S. deals with states such as Russia, China, and Iran which challenge the liberal world order on grounds of ideology and/or power politics. Obama’s first instinct is multilateral diplomacy through the UN or similar venues. Most often, however, those talks will not bring the desired results and might even be dangerous if the U.S. is not negotiating from a position of strength. Hence, it will be a foreign policy priority of Obama to (re-) create strong partnerships for America – in the Pacific, in Latin America, and, most prominently, in Europe. NATO, and especially NATO’s European members, must seize this opportunity to gain sustainable influence and relevance in the emerging world order of the 21st century. What that will mean in terms of specific policy choices will largely be driven by events and political interactions outside of NATO’s direct control. Still, upon assuming office, Obama will enjoy immense trust and good-will among the NATO countries and beyond. Moreover, the extreme positions of 2003 are discredited on both sides of the Atlantic – policymakers have understood that without transatlantic cooperation, none of the urgent problems in international relations can be solved. Thus, for the Alliance in the era of Obama, there is always the audacity of hope.