

GREAT EXPECTATIONS: OBAMA'S FOREIGN POLICY

AIIA NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S FORUM ADELAIDE 5 MAY 2009

BACKGROUND NOTES

The following notes are provided for background information for participants in the Australian Institute of International Affairs' National President's Forum.

These notes identify issues and provide brief information on the new Administration's foreign policy to provide an inspiration for discussion. Information has been compiled from public sources to illuminate areas for focus and spark debate.

1. The New Administration

a. **Basic Objectives and Philosophy:**

Change is the key term: the legacy of the Bush Jr Administration shall be overcome. The low reputation of the U.S. needs to be raised, i.e. by expanding the foreign service and fighting global poverty via Millennium goals.¹ An example of new politics: law on ban of the export of cluster bombs.²

b. **New People in Washington:**

A President with a totally different background, who listens to his staff and does not only want to strengthen old partnerships but also build new ones

- i. The President: civil rights attorney, magna cum laude JD at Harvard Law School
- ii. Cabinet Members: higher diversity and different styles (see list of key policy makers attached)
- iii. Senior staff members: deputy and secretary staff members are well-trained, academically accomplished and focused on their issues

c. **The Congress**

Has the legislative power and also the 'power of the purse' and should not be underestimated. Has a Democratic majority

d. **Public Opinion in the United States**

May cause problems for the Administration: Obama's political program is already being called 'European socialism.'³ Foes within the U.S. include religious fundamentalists, foreign policy unilateralists and lobbies eg to fight the green economy⁴

"Know that America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity, and that we are ready to lead once more."

B. Obama, Washington, D.C., 20 January 2009

1 <http://www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/>

2 <http://www.taz.de/1/politik/amerika/artikel/1/yes-he-can/>

3 <http://www.taz.de/1/debatte/kommentar/artikel/1/munter-den-kreis-quadriert/>

4 <http://www.taz.de/1/debatte/kommentar/artikel/1/munter-den-kreis-quadriert/>

2. Global and Regional Challenges

a. Main Foreign Policy Goals

The foreign policy agenda includes global security issues like ending the war in Iraq responsibly⁵, finishing the fight against the Taliban and al Qaeda in Afghanistan and securing nuclear weapons and loose nuclear materials from terrorists. Main challenges are terrorism and nuclear weapons, climate change and poverty, genocide and disease.⁶ As well as its own agenda, the Administration has to handle the old problems and leftovers of the last Bush Administration and consequently "does not yet have a complete set of answers to the problems facing it."⁷

b. The Global Financial Crisis

Overshadows all challenges and is involved in all actions, therefore the Administration wants to act quickly, because otherwise the recession could linger for years. The instrument for a new approach to the economy is the American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan, including eg a doubling of the production of alternative energy within three years, improving the energy efficiency of two million American homes, investing in schools etc.⁸

c. Regional Challenges

- i. **The Middle East:** New strategy for Afghanistan (and Pakistan): increased troop level, civil work, revitalizing Afghanistan's economic development, demanding the Afghan government crack down on corruption and the illicit opium trade and finding, disrupting and destroying Al Qaeda by winning the battle of ideas and restoring Americas influence and values.⁹
- ii. **East Asia:** New focus. U.S. wants more effective framework in Asia that goes beyond bilateral agreements, occasional summits, and ad hoc arrangements. The strong ties with allies like Japan, South Korea and Australia are to be kept. Attempting to continue six-party talks on North Korea.¹⁰
- iii. **Europe:** Vice-President Biden's first trip. Obama in April. Focus on common values, friendship and trade. Germany at the center of European affairs and a key partner in U.S. relations with Europeans in NATO and the European Union.¹¹
- iv. **Latin America:** strong relations in general. Problems are drug trafficking and border insecurity with Mexico. Clinton visited Mexico in March. Dealing with 2000s "pink tide" of democratic socialism in several south American countries.

"So today, I state clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.... We need real and immediate consequences for countries caught breaking the rules or trying to leave the treaty without cause."

B. Obama, Prague, 5 April 2009

⁵ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/iraq/>

⁶ http://www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/foreign_policy/

⁷ http://www.aspi.org.au/publications/publication_details.aspx?ContentID=203&pubtype=9

⁸ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/taxes/>

⁹ <http://whitehouse2.org/priorities/358-find-disrupt-and-destroy-al-qaeda>

¹⁰ http://www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/foreign_policy/

¹¹ <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3997.htm>

3. The New Administration in the Asia-Pacific Region

a. **The Priority to be given to the Asia-Pacific Region**

New U.S. Administration sees the shift of power towards Asia - the first trip of the Secretary of State led her to Japan, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea and China. We will see a greater U.S. presence in Asia¹²

b. **The US and China**

U.S. offers friendship to China. Human rights concerns cannot interfere working together on the GFC¹³

c. **The US and India**

With help after 9/11 with information on al-Qaeda and contribution to war on terrorism, India has gained new importance for U.S. Shared interest in fighting terrorism, creating a strategically stable Asia.

d. **The US and Japan**

Cornerstone of U.S. security interests in Asia. U.S. works closely with Japan and Australia under the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue and the Security and Defense Cooperation Forum. In South-East Asia, U.S.-Japan cooperation is vital for stability and political and economic reform.

e. **The U.S. and South-East Asia**

Australia has close and strong links to most countries in the region and as the U.S. engages more, common interests of U.S.A. and Australia can be met, i.e. in aid for Timor-Leste. The US has a stabilising influence in many states, i.e. Singapore.

f. **US and Small Pacific States**

Generally minor U.S. interests although aid provided in several cases. Potential intervention if problems concerning the U.S. occur, but with GFC interest will even get smaller.

g. **Multilateralism and Bilateralism**

Administration seem more comfortable with multilateral diplomacy. U.S. will study acceding to ASEAN TAC which could lead to it joining the EAS. Exploring opportunities for a trilateral dialogue between Japan, U.S. and China.¹⁴ *Arab News* interpreted the Clinton trip as a mobilization of Asian help to fight the U.S. recession and GFC. *The Times* of India noted one goal was to demonstrate a new U.S. commitment to work with Asia on "problems that no one nation, including ours, can deal with alone."¹⁵

"It's my first trip, obviously, as Secretary of State, and going to Asia is, for me, a very big part of how we're going to demonstrate the Obama Administration's approach to dealing with the multitude of problems that we see, but also the opportunities as well. This region is indispensable to our efforts to seize the opportunities and meet the challenges of the 21st century, and it is part of a larger context in which we intend to create networks of partners in order to deal with the problems that no nation, even ours, can deal with alone."

H. Clinton, Tokyo, 15 February 2009

¹² http://www.aspi.org.au/publications/publication_details.aspx?ContentID=203&pubtype=9

¹³ <http://www.worldpress.org/Asia/3309.cfm>

¹⁴ <http://www.worldpress.org/Asia/3309.cfm>

¹⁵ <http://worldpress.org/Asia/3309.cfm>

4. Australia and the New Administration

a. Responding to the US Agenda

The focus on Asia is a welcome sign for Australia which sees the same global trend. Many of the issues on the U.S. priority list are also of interest to Australia. In the Obama-Rudd meeting there was agreement to work together on clean coal technology as area of job creation.¹⁶

b. The US, the Asian Great Powers and Australia

Some nuances might occur in ordering U.S. and Australian strategic priorities, with Australia more inclined to prioritise Asia and the need for a better regional security architecture."¹⁷ In security issues the U.S. may mistrust China but in trade issues U.S. and China will be strong partners

c. Defence Relations and Afghanistan

In the 24 March "meeting of the minds" Obama raised expectations that Australian troops would be needed in Afghanistan for "several years" more.¹⁸ The question of more troops has been raised by NATO to coalition nations.¹⁹ The US should be pleased with Australia's response.

d. Future of ANZUS

The alliance with the U.S. has enjoyed a period of close and sustained cooperation. Rudd is a Prime Minister "hot for the U.S. alliance".²⁰ Obama described Australia as one of U.S. closest allies. Rudd described his visit as a new and important chapter in the relationship.²¹

e. Relationship Between Leaders

Some analysts suggest the two new leaders have much in common."They are ideological soul mates...Both are personally inclined to be analytical individuals, both have a degree of detachment about how they look at things. They will be able to connect intellectually."²²

f. Australia's Ambitions

Australia as a middle power is big enough to have an impact but not large enough to shape outcomes by itself: it has the capacity to act as a foreign policy entrepreneur.²³ Rudd is ambitious in foreign policy and "genuinely wants to help shape the international system. He wants Australian foreign policy to make a difference to the challenges facing the world. And he wants to play a part in this himself."²⁴

"And Mr President, to see the return of US global economic leadership, we appreciate that very much, and it's going to be necessary in the difficult times which lie ahead for some time."

K. Rudd, Washington, D.C., 24 March 2009

16 <http://www.smh.com.au/world/rudd-and-obama-in-meeting-of-the-minds-20090325-9987.html>

17 http://www.aspi.org.au/publications/publication_details.aspx?ContentID=203&pubtype=9

18 <http://www.smh.com.au/world/rudd-and-obama-in-meeting-of-the-minds-20090325-9987.html> Phillip Coorey March 24, 2009

19 http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-03/18/content_11030845.htm

20 [http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2009/01/The-Downer-legacy-\(part-2\)-The-US-alliance.aspx](http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2009/01/The-Downer-legacy-(part-2)-The-US-alliance.aspx).

21 <http://www.smh.com.au/world/rudd-and-obama-in-meeting-of-the-minds-20090325-9987.html>

22 <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,25239260-661,00.html?from=communities>

23 <http://www.aiia.asn.au/associations/8220/files/Australia%20as%20a%20Middle%20Power%20Final.pdf>

24 <http://www.lowyinstitute.org/Publication.asp?pid=942>

Key Policy Makers for Foreign Policy

Secretary of State: Hillary Rodham Clinton, a United States Senator from New York from 2001 to 2009. In the Senate, she initially supported the George W. Bush Administration on some foreign policy issues, which included voting for the Iraq War Resolution. She subsequently opposed the Administration on its conduct of the war in Iraq, and opposed it on most domestic issues.

Secretary of Defense: Robert Michael Gates (since 2006). Gates served for 26 years in CIA and NSA, Director of Central Intelligence under Bush, served with USAF, President of Texas A&M University, was member of several corporate boards, also member of the Iraq Study Group.

Secretary of Homeland Security: Secretary Janet A. Napolitano, was governor of the state of Arizona, she served as Arizona Attorney General from 1999 to 2002.

United States Ambassador to the United Nations: Susan Rice, a D Phil in international relations - advocate of tough action to end the killing in Darfur, she supported the idea of military action to force the Sudanese government to halt the massacres – saw Rwanda after the 1994 genocide, while working on the National Security Council: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7758989.stm>

National Security Advisor: James Logan Jones Jr. (retired United States Marine Corps four-star general), was special envoy for Middle East security in 2007

Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs: Richard A. Boucher since 200, longest-serving Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs in the Department of State's history, 1993-1996 served as U.S. Ambassador to Cyprus and from 1996-1999 he headed the U.S. Consulate General in Hong Kong, U.S. Senior Official for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) from July 1999 to April 2000.

Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan: Richard C. A. Holbrooke, a top-ranking American diplomat, magazine editor, author, professor, Peace Corps official, and investment banker. He is also the only person to have held the Assistant Secretary of State position for two different regions of the world (Asia from 1977–1981 and Europe from 1994–1996). Ambassador to Germany 1993–1994, Dayton Peace Accords 1995, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations 1999–2001.

Special Representative North Korea Policy: Stephen W. Bosworth, Dean of The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. He served as the United States Ambassador to the Republic of Korea from 1997 to 2001 as well as previous posts as Ambassador to Tunisia and the Philippines. Former Executive Director of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization and President of the United States Japan Foundation.

Special Envoy Six-Party Talks: Ambassador Sung Kim, a career Foreign Service Officer who headed the Office of Korean Affairs from 2006 to 2008.

Special Envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference: Sada Cumber, a Pakistan-born entrepreneur and investor based in Austin, Texas who has founded eleven companies in technology-based industries.

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