

Obama's "Coalition of the Willing" Against Iran?

Continuity rather than Change in US Foreign Policy

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A Mere Atmospheric Change in Obama's Foreign Policy: U.S. London-Based Pundits See Rather Continuity Than Change

LONDON - After Barack Obama's victory in the U.S. presidential elections last week, discussions about what direction an Obama/Biden Administration is likely to follow are gaining momentum.

Invited by the London Middle East Institute (LMEI) on 11 November to speak about the foreign policy of the next U.S. administration, the London-based American analyst Jonathan Paris anticipated an Obama foreign policy much in line with the one of the current Bush administration.

The main areas of concern, he asserted, would be Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran. Focusing extensively on the latter, Paris said that sanctions will be kept up with even the aim of aggravating those. Meanwhile, one should not "beg" Russia to join the efforts by the P5+1 - i.e. the five permanent UN Security Council members and Germany - to increase pressure on Iran. Rather would it suffice to wait for Russia to join an anti-Iran "coalition of the willing." Moscow has so far been reluctant to Washington's insistence to impose further sanctions on Tehran. According to Paris, who like Norman Podhoretz is an adjunct fellow at the neoconservative U.S. think-tank Hudson Institute, Washington's overall goal would be to "win over" Russia so to avoid any opposition to its preferred policies.

Drawing on Obama's campaign announcement to enter into direct negotiations with Iran, Paris stressed that this would test the Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei's willingness to come along. Although proponents of a thus-designed "overture" vis-à-vis Tehran expect the Iranian leadership to repudiate, other experts point out that such an outcome is far from obvious with the Iranians being seriously interested in normalizing ties with the United States. Paris reiterated that Israel could only attack Iran with U.S. support.

Paris, a Middle East fellow with the Council on Foreign Relations in New York from 1995 to 2000, stated that other spotlights would be Pakistan - which he described as constituting the "prize" -, "the most pivotal state in the Middle East," Egypt, with President Hosni Mubarak's succession pending, and Iraq where "corruption" of the Baghdad government would be the core problem without mentioning Obama's promise to withdraw occupation forces there. While tackling the so-called "rogue states," of course China would be a central focal point for Washington's foreign policies, Paris added.

Multilateralism “Yes,” Multipolarity “Not So Fast”!

Paris, who is also a member of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in London, classified a future president Obama opting for “cooptation” rather than confrontation, a characteristic attributed to the Bush Administration. While he approved multilateralism, he cautioned against multipolarity whose dawn he commented with occurring “not so fast.”

He described the decision-making process of the forthcoming administration to be “bottom-up,” implying that Obama will be very much acting upon advice given to him. Paris conceded that only “atmospheric change” would come during an Obama presidency.

A few days earlier on 5 November, Mark Fitzpatrick, at a panel on “nuclear futures after the U.S. elections” at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, stated that establishing a weapons-of-mass-destruction free zone in the Middle East could not be found among the top-ten list of an Obama administration. Fitzpatrick, an American senior fellow for non-proliferation at the IISS, said that the main obstacle to launching a regional conference to such an end would be the lack of “mutual recognition” between Israel and Iran. However, he did not mention Iran’s “grand bargain” offer of spring 2003 to the U.S. which *inter alia* included a *de facto* recognition of the state of Israel. Washington at that time ignored this remarkable Iranian overture that included Tehran’s willingness to settle all controversial issues in U.S.-Iran relations.[1]

Fitzpatrick presaged that a future president Obama would command U.S. marines in the Persian Gulf to start communicating with the Iranian navy in order to avoid any confrontation provoked by misperceptions. In terms of nuclear disarmament, he proposed that in the first 100 days of the new administration, the U.S. could de-alert the status of its nuclear arsenal, but preferably doing so only when Russia acts likewise.

In sum, both London-based U.S. analysts did not signal any change of an Obama administration’s foreign policy stance especially when compared to the Bush administration’s second term. Their remarks implied that the U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) of 2002 and 2005 which formed the basis of President George W. Bush’s foreign policy agenda and which included the Bush/Wolfowitz preventive strike doctrine would not be revised. According to veteran U.S. Middle East expert William R. Polk the removal of the George W. Bush’s NSS, which “threatens Iran with destruction,” would be an absolute prerequisite for any serious change in Washington’s world policy.[2] The American pundits rather upheld the belief that there will be continuity in Washington’s strategic outlines and actual policies with Obama and that the only change that could be expected will occur in terms of rhetoric.

Notes

[1] See Gareth Porter (2006) [“Burnt Offering. How a 2003 secret overture from Tehran might have led to a deal on Iran’s nuclear capacity—if the Bush administration hadn’t rebuffed it,”](#) *The American Prospect*, Vol. 17, No. 6 (June), pp. 20—25.

[2] See Ali Fathollah-Nejad (2008) [“Iran Falling into the “Net” of a “Worldwide Policy”:](#) *On the U.S. Foreign Policy Doctrine and Its Present Dangers - Exclusive Interview with William R. Polk,”* *Global Research*, 16 October.

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