

Obama, New Man for an Old World?

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Executive Summary

The election of the 44th President of the United States was overwhelming and revolutionary. Indeed, Barack Obama represents for many Americans an innovative reaction to the social and economic immobility of the country, in other words, he has embodied the American need of change. In this paper, the author provides an analysis of Obama's factors of strengths and the challenges he will have to face both at national and international level. As enlightened by the author, during his first mandate President-elect Obama will concentrate on domestic economic issues, preventing the recession from becoming a depression. In truth, Obama's essential challenge will consist in balancing the protection of American citizens' interests with international policies aimed at an open and integrated international system, especially concerning critical issues such as environment and energy sources, international trade and terrorism.

Issues

Has the time come? Has the world really changed? It's too soon to say. Yet there is undoubtedly hope and, for the first time in past years, euphoria that it might happen. The election of the 44th President of the United States was decided, as it often occurs, on domestic policies more than foreign ones. The U.S. financial crisis was a major factor in the election of Barack Obama, who was considered by the American electorate as better-placed to tackle it than John McCain. We can assume, therefore, that the elected President Obama will concentrate on domestic economic issues during his first mandate. It's a thorny issue: recession caused by a decrease in consumption, rising unemployment, impoverishment of the middle class, financial disasters, internal and external deficits. Such a severe scenario is without precedent in this Post-War era.

Obama's first challenge will be to avoid economic stagnation and prevent the present recession from becoming a depression, whose duration and virulence would be difficult to estimate. In truth, however, the state of the U.S. economy is something that should interest the whole world. A sick center of the capitalistic empire could negatively influence the whole global organism. We must hope, therefore, that from a cure for the great American invalid we can move on to international issues, such as that of a new multi-polar government for the global economy. Many believe that the lack of efficient institutions and rules are the main cause of this world crisis. This is one of the issues for which the new president will have to make great commitments and brave decisions.

One of the issues to be considered is the connection between domestic policies aimed at protecting the interests of American citizens and international policies that will safeguard an open and integrated international economic system. The area where Obama's policies raise the most doubts is trade. It's possible that the financial crisis will lead the democratic majority in the Congress towards positions of protectionism

Keywords

Elections, recession, energy, resources, demographic increase

Quotables

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- Obama's first challenge will be to avoid economic stagnation and prevent the present recession from becoming a depression, whose duration and virulence would be difficult to estimate.

- First of all, Illinois' senator has shown great interest in environmental issues, making this a national priority and therefore we can assume he is interested in the topic at a global level as well. Moreover, the world's demographic pressure, together with the tumultuous growth of new world powers, renders even more urgent the search for new energy sources and their management

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Abstract

The election of the 44th President represented an innovative reaction to the social and economic immobility of the country. The most important challenge that the new President has to face is the recession and the rebalancing of the domestic market. On the foreign policies issues, the international trade, terrorism and the environmental issues represent the urgent point in his agenda.

and closure, for example, the renegotiation of free trade areas such as NAFTA. History shows that the first great wave of international exchange (1815-1913) waned because of the incapacity of governing costs and tensions generated domestically as a result of the expansion of finance and global commerce. So we must hope that, to avoid closure and protectionist conflicts, the U.S. will assure an international trade policy that will allow for both for the integration of global economies and the rise in standards of living.

Yet the global village expects much more from Obama. First of all, Illinois' senator has shown great interest in environmental issues, making this a national priority and therefore we can assume he is interested in the topic at a global level as well. Moreover, the world's demographic pressure, together with the tumultuous growth of new world powers, renders even more urgent the search for new energy sources and their management, starting with the U.S., which represents one of the biggest consumers of energy. This is dangerous terrain for Obama.

Another of the most difficult tasks for Obama regards international terrorism and the best way to defeat it. We must also mention the widespread hope for an easing of international tensions. The new US administration will have to tackle many issues: USA's future presence in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan, dialogue with Iran, present conflicts in Latin America and in Africa, future relationships with Russia and China, and last but not least, the never-ending problem of the Middle East. Much will, obviously, depend on the willingness for dialogue and the respective and changing positions of the international actors involved. These are particular issues on which Obama will gamble his international credibility. He emerged as a new man for the old world, in every sense, starting from his young age, his estrangement from the establishment, his skin color. For the old world, he is considered a modern reference point on which to base the renaissance of the global system. For this, Obama carries a huge burden on his shoulders.

For the time being he has fulfilled American expectations with his personality, because he embodies the need to change. Neither Obama nor McCain were big personalities in the U.S. establishment of recent years. They were both new men, the answer of U.S. political parties to turn the page. As a matter of fact, the America of previous years felt more like a republic based on family succession or clans than an America that promises its citizens that they can scale the mountain of power as long as they're committed. In these last elections we witnessed Obama's success: he first defeated his rival, Hillary Clinton, in the democratic nomination election -- probably because she represented the continuation of that family legacy -- and then Senator McCain who, though he was not very close to the Bush administration, still suffered from its association and from not having interpreted -- like Obama -- the desire for a radical change requested by the American public.

Obama's election is overwhelming and revolutionary. With these elections, American society has demonstrated several things: first, to have avoided the Bradley effect, in other words the difficulty for someone of a certain ethnic group to achieve a high public post; in Obama's case, the highest of all; second, America showed that it wanted the opinion of the world towards it to change.

During a recent television debate, Moises Naim, the editor of Foreign Policy's, pointed out that in these elections Americans not only desired, but also achieved, its return to the nation with the highest and most guaranteed social mobility.

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In fact, Obama represents, for many Americans an innovative reaction to years of social and economic immobility among ethnically disadvantaged classes such as afro-americans, hispano-americans and all those generationally excluded from power. Obama managed to be in synch with young people through an innovative communications policy made of emails, sms and youtube.

This craving for change, development, stability and peace has interested the entire world as countries usually hostile to the United States have been asking themselves – taking a huge leap of faith in Obama – whether these elections are the best thing that could happen to them as well. Not only has there been huge mass media attention given to these elections, in part due to the technological progress, but most of all because of the expectation of something new out in the horizon. A sort of new moral authority has emerged made of new and high moral principles. There's no doubt that the 47-year-old president-elect has a huge responsibility.

Will Obama be capable of expressing a vision, ideal and at the same time an image of the United States completely different than that of a military superpower that has underestimated cultural and psychological aspects and ended up using – in a paradoxically counterproductive way – mainly hard power? Will the winning image of a man who wants to use above all soft power be performed into a real capacity to convince and draw other international actors into choices shared for the global good? And will Europe – uncertain, divided and torn by euro-skeptic impulses as it is – be able to render Venus and Mars a closer couple in order to manage world affairs? Or will the new president be more attracted by more vibrant contexts, such as Asia? Of course, Europeans have much faith and fondness for the new president, but will Europe finally be able to provide that number which might be used in an emergency, thereby giving the European Union a single voice in foreign policy?

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