

# Continuity and Change in the US Foreign and Security Policy with the Accession of President Obama

Nik Hynek<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The question of continuity and change in the US Foreign/Security Policy (henceforth USFSP) after the accession of President Obama can be constructively studied from two complementary perspectives: the thematic perspective and the procedural perspective. This method determines the structure of this analysis. In the beginning, key issues of the USFSP in the context of the change of the American administration are examined. A part of the discussion of the transition from the Republican administration of George W. Bush to the Democratic administration of Barack Obama will be an attempt to follow *the continuity and change in the key issues of the USFSP and the change in the prioritization of issues*. For a comparison of the approaches of Bush and Obama, one needs to approach the topic indirectly due to the fact that Obama's presidency is still in its early stages, which means that we still cannot completely evaluate the USFSP under the current American president. It is precisely the fact that it is impossible to compare eight years of the government of George W. Bush with approximately seven months of the Obama government that is the cause of the indirect approach of this evaluation. It will be based on a combination of extrapolation from existing but still scattered early signals and defining what can be regarded as a success when considering the goals of the primary issues of the USFSP on the basis of Obama's publically known positions. Subsequently, an evaluation of *the preferred procedural means of reaching the set goals* in the framework of the central issues of the USFSP will tie into the perspective related to changes in thematic priorities. The main finding of the first part will be that even though Obama is seen as the president who put an end to several trends that were introduced by Bush, such a conclusion must necessarily be

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<sup>1</sup> Nik Hynek is a lecturer at Metropolitan University Prague and a Research Fellow, Nik was a Visiting Research Fellow at the London School of Economics and a Visiting Research Scholar at the Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies, Columbia University. He may be reached at: [hynek@iir.cz](mailto:hynek@iir.cz).

rejected as reductive or even misleading. In contrast to this, in the second part, the analysis will point out several shifts associated with the change of the administration.

## **Continuity and Change in USFSP on the Thematic Level**

The presented analysis considers the following issues of the USFSP to be central: the stabilization campaign in Iraq (i), the stabilization project in Afghanistan (ii), the issue of relations with Russia in the context of missile defense and the efforts to reduce the number of ballistic missiles and nuclear warheads (iii), the issue of rogue states, in the frame of which there is a breaking away from Bush's discourse on the so-called Axis of Evil and the insulation of Iran (iv), and North Korea (v), which are now newly treated as separate cases. Before we move on to the analysis of the changes and continuities in the issues introduced above, it is necessary to emphasize that thus far, there did not emerge any new and unexpected issue that would really test Obama in his role as the Commander in Chief. In this respect, the case of the liberation of Richard Phillips, the captain of the cargo ship Maersk Alabama, who was detained by Somali pirates, surely cannot be considered to be a real test. As for the preparations for the process of transition from Bush to Obama before the inauguration ceremony, they were carried out well above the level of the usual standards of comparison – like the transition itself.

### **Iraq**

The accession of Obama to the Presidential Office was closely connected to the necessity to quickly assume a position in regard to the two most prominent foreign-security challenges of today: the stabilization campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan respectively. In regard to Iraq, Obama – who was still a presidential candidate at the time – assumed a minority centre-left liberal position toward the war, and his critical attitude was evident in fragmentary votes. His presidential decision, which he announced at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina on 27 February 2009, was marked by a pragmatic shift in regard to the issue. Instead of the original tempo that Obama adumbrated during his presidential campaign, that is, his promise to pull one or two brigades engaged in combat every month (during a period of 16 months), as president, Obama opted for a compromise plan. According to this new plan, the American soldiers directly engaged in combat in Iraq will be pulled from Iraq before August 2010. The remainder – 35,000 to 50,000 soldiers that will remain in Iraq as a “transition component” – will then complete various tasks in the country (especially training Iraqi security components, battling terrorist cells, and protecting military and civilian persons) until December 2011.

To this day, Obama has not accepted Bush's simplified interpretation of the success of the military strategy of selectively increasing the number of troops (the surge strategy), which was especially successful in the Iraqi province of Anbar (Obama explains that the success was related to the combination of the surge strategy with the so-called Sunni Awakening in the province and its subsequent geographical expansion). The key influence on this change towards pragmatism in Obama's ideological position came especially from the American Minister of Defense Robert Gates, who served in both of the administrations, and General David Petraeus, who was originally the Commanding General of MNF-Iraq and is now newly the commander of US Central Command. In regard to this issue, we can evaluate the change in the administration in the following way: **general change** – the priority of Iraq decreased in the context of the American government redirecting its attention, troops and finances in the direction of Afghanistan; **partial change** – a decrease in the rigidity of the plan and the speed of pulling troops out of Iraq, and the partial possibility of revising the plan on the basis of the security situation; **continuity** – continuity on the tactical and operational levels, as well as the acceptance of responsibility for the political development of the situation in Iraq. The operation in Iraq will be considered to be successful if at least minimal democracy is upheld, the territorial integrity of the country is maintained, and the systematic order of ethnic and religious conflicts as well as terrorist attacks is weakened.

## Afghanistan

Already during his presidential campaign, Obama criticized (then) president Bush for his relative absolution of political responsibility for the development of the situation in Afghanistan, the corresponding problematic change in the original strategic priorities of the US, i.e. defeating the Taliban and al-Qaeda and stabilizing Afghanistan, the invasion of Iraq, and the subsequent steps taken in the attempts to stabilize it. The overturning of this situation in favour of the original strategic priority and the declaration of the intention to defeat the Taliban represent the biggest planned foreign-security commitment for President Obama to date, and it will probably continue to be so for the next several years. However Obama returned to the original political commitment to assume responsibility for the developments in Afghanistan, his new security strategy is different from that of Bush in several aspects. Obama's biggest break with the Bush administration may be the abandonment of friendly and unconditional negotiations with Pakistan as an allied country in the framework of the discursive abandonment of the so-called war against terrorism. This course of action was replaced by a new strategic conception that sees Pakistan as an important part of Afghanistan's lack of security, but not through a prism of viewing, *a priori*, friendliness as a functional solution (e.g. Bush-Musharaf). Thus, a strategic battlefield now newly connects Afghanistan and Pakistan (the so-called Af-Pak strategy). In the new American conception, it is evident that the improvement

of the situation in Afghanistan is directly dependent on the improvement of the situation in Pakistan, especially in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and neighbouring regions (e.g. Swat).

The most significant evidence of an increase in the American efforts to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan, and namely of Obama substantially increasing the United States' assumption of political responsibility for developments in the country in comparison to Bush, is the import of the surge strategy, which involves 17,000 troops, from Iraq. This step is very risky, not only in terms of the question of the appropriateness of the American strategy in the context of the Afghan asymmetrical conflict, as even General Petraeus was originally sceptical of the strategy's applicability (due to the unique geographic determinants and specific historical-political factors), but also in terms of the allied commitment. The top priority of the issue in the current USFSP is translated into political pressure on the allies, (NATO ISAF, and in the case of some allies, also their participation in the so-called Coalition of Willing within the framework of the Operation Enduring Freedom), especially pressure to follow the American surge strategy and provide security instructors. These instructors are to raise the standards of the Afghan police, which, in contrast to the Afghan National Army, are in a catastrophic state.

Even though many countries promised to increase the number of personnel in their contingents, many consider pulling their contingents out of Afghanistan after the recent presidential elections on the condition that a dramatic worsening of the security situation will not take place. This situation will present one of the key tests of Obama's ability to push through his Afghan strategy at the multilateral level. The new American conception will also influence the reformulation of the character of the allied commitment. In the framework of NATO, there already began the American pressure to increase the harmonization of the cooperation of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) in the framework of the mandate of NATO ISAF. There is now also American pressure on EU specialists in terms of the plan to utilize the expertise of the EU in the training of the Afghan police and in civilian and military crisis management. Currently, they are more like an aggregate of national contributions rather than one coordinated multilateral contribution. This is one of the reasons for why a plan to build a multilateral coordination agency for the PRTs in Kabul is being considered. A partial advancement away from autonomous PRTs can be seen in the emphasis on multilevel strategy, as well as on the participation of neighbouring countries.

Generally, we can evaluate the change in the administration in regard to this issue in the following way: **general change** – a significant increase in the priority of Afghanistan, which is Obama's strongest current political commitment, which is evident in the surge strategy; **partial change** – the regional interlacing of the security situations in Afghanistan and Pakistan; the effort to involve Iran in the solution (which is rather formal); **continuity** – the constant pressure

from the US on the allied commitment, even if Obama's reasons for it are the opposite of Bush's (the US freeing its hands for Iraq vs. the US as a role model in the framework of the surge strategy); in the framework of NATO, Obama still prefers the dimension of the "solidarity" of the commitment to NATO over an approach that would reflect real needs (e.g. changes in the command structure and a plan for the stabilization campaign). The operation in Afghanistan will be considered successful if at least minimal democracy is upheld; a viable national army is established; the state of the Afghan police is improved; the Taliban are pushed back in terms of territory and their influence is limited (liquidating the leaders of al-Qaeda would be a big plus); the number of terrorist attacks is reduced; if there is a possibility of realizing at least a part of the originally planned civilian reconstruction projects, and, last but not least; if there is an allied presence in the country at least in the framework of the current numbers.

## **Russia, Efforts towards Nuclear Arms Control and Missile Defense**

The issue of American-Russian relations is pulled here into the context of the control of nuclear arms control/disarmament and missile defense. The context of missile defense directly affects the Czech Republic in relation to the signed (but still unratified) agreement on the placement of American X-band radar on the territory of the Czech Republic in the framework of the so-called third pillar of the American National Missile Defense System. The third pillar was proposed by the former president Bush, and the project is the exact reason for why Bush unilaterally backed out of the ABM agreement (1972), which strongly limited the number and range of anti-ballistic missile defense systems. Obama's position on this matter remained unknown for a long time during his presidential campaign. Shortly before the elections, under pressure from the media, Obama finally expressed his views on the matter. He stated that he would support the construction of the radar under two conditions: 1) the Iranian threat will remain and grow; and 2) the system's financial *and* functional effectiveness will be proven. As the Government Accountability Office (GAO) repeatedly proved, the system falls short of the plan of the American Missile Defense Agency (MDA) in terms of several technological aspects and meeting deadlines.

On 06 July 2009, President Obama, and his Russian counterpart Medvedev, tentatively came to the agreement that the process of strategic nuclear weapons reduction would continue, with the goal of lowering the number of nuclear warheads to 1,500-1,675 and the number of carriers to 500-1,000 before the year 2012. This involves an extension of the nuclear regime after the START 1 agreement from 1991 expires. START 1 limited the number of warheads to 6,000 and the number of carriers to 1,600, and it will expire in December 2009. That what is involved is a long and gradual bilateral process is apparent from

the signing of the so-called Moscow agreement (SORT), which in 2002 decided that every side would have 1,700-2,200 warheads in an operational state until 2012. The current tentative agreement can be evaluated as a completely routine step in both the procedural and substantive contexts of this issue area. Obama is merely continuing in the commitment that was put into practice by the former president Bush during his meeting with the then Russian president Putin in Sochi in the spring of 2008.

What definitely does not show the characteristics of mere routine, though, is the context of the agreement, in which three other issues play key roles: 1) Obama's efforts towards full nuclear disarmament in the future, which has supporters across the entire political spectrum in the US (e.g. Kissinger, Schultz, Perry, or Nunn); 2) the third pillar of the American missile defense; and 3) the efforts of the US and the West in general to put an end to clandestine military nuclear program and ballistic-missile program in Iran. In the case of efforts towards future nuclear disarmament, Obama presented his radical vision during his Prague speech on April 5, 2009. At its core was an emphasis on the moral responsibility of the US for a world without nuclear weapons, in the framework of which the legal following up on the START-1 and SORT agreements, as well as the hastened American ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), is only the first albeit important step.

An awareness that Obama will try to keep lowering the numbers of nuclear warheads and carriers in the future because of his vision is a part of the current Russian attitude. As was shown by the announcements of Russian President Medvedev and the country's Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov after Obama's visit to Moscow, Russia conditioned – even if vaguely – its signing of the tentatively agreed upon agreement on the US cancelling its plans to install components of the national missile defense in the Czech Republic and Poland. Obama's position in regard to the system remains pragmatic, as already pointed out. It is evident that the Russian demand cannot be taken seriously when considering the numbers of warheads and ballistic missiles mentioned above. However, when it comes to the political dimension of the demand, this statement no longer applies.

In addition, for Obama, the missile defense project is not a narrow geo-strategic issue, as it was for Bush, but a political issue. This can be clearly seen in Obama's private letter to President Medvedev from the beginning of February 2009. Parts of the letter which (probably intentionally) got into the hands of the media indicate Obama's readiness to exchange the third pillar plan for a more significant decrease in the current nuclear arsenals and likewise for the beginning of pressure from Russia on Iran in the question of putting an end to the nuclear program and ballistic-missile program. Even though Obama's efforts towards being accommodating to Russia and verbally "resetting" the US's previous relationship with Russia are appropriate and understandable, the actual carrying out of Obama's intentions and the political-strategic

implications are now much more problematic. For one thing, the quality of the personal relations of the presidents of the US and Russia has a much smaller effect on the political results than is usually assumed. In addition to this, Obama can hardly expect particularly strong political support from Russia in the direction of Iran due to Russia's economic interests in this country. This is the case in spite of the fact that Russia temporarily stopped some of its sales of military supplies to Iran, including its selling of a super-advanced anti-aircraft defense system S-300 (partially also because of earlier pressure from Israel). The earlier Russian sceptical reaction to Obama's letter and the current Russian condition for continuing in the reduction of the nuclear arsenals of both of the countries (the cancellation of the installation of missile-defense components in the Czech Republic and Poland) are given by the understandable efforts of Russia to avoid looking like a subordinate country that would try to diplomatically have an effect on Iran on the basis of American rules. Thus, the situation is still in the middle of "the prelude" - or playing for time. The problem is that Russia and the US have different expectations about the sequence of the steps: the US wants to see Russia successfully putting pressure on Iran and, at the same time, the Russian signature on a legally binding document that would limit the nuclear arsenals of the US and Russia. The US is then also willing to freeze or even cancel the plan for the Central European components of missile defense (Obama is taking 2–3 months to revise the project). On the contrary, Russia wants a guarantee that the last step in the American plan will come first, and then it also hopes that instead of having to put pressure on Iran, it will be enough to make more cuts in the numbers of nuclear warheads and carriers in order to uphold at least its basic functional relations with the US.

Obama's efforts to establish a bilateral line as a basic diplomatic strategy in regard to Russia are already alarming for several reasons. Obama, in his letter to Medvedev, completely reframed the third pillar from a security matter into a political bargaining chip for negotiations about the nuclear disarmament and/or coordinated advance in regard to Iran. Likewise, Obama did not consult this step with the Czech or Polish executives, which was confirmed in the harsh statements of the government officials of both countries in the media. The reactions to Obama's approach also confirmed that the Czech and Polish governments always recognized the third pillar as an issue that is important for its geopolitical dimension and that would allow the two countries to increase their international-political capital (Poland also saw it as an opportunity to increase its economic capital). So far, what has been surprising was the absence of any relevant statements on the part of Obama in regard to the commitment on the level of NATO to interconnecting the American and alliance anti-rocket systems in the future, as has been stipulated by the Bucharest Declaration. Thus, so far, the US managed to completely bypass NATO in regard to this issue.

What is probably the most disconcerting – as was shown by the previous points – is that Obama is not only continuing in the established tendency of the US and Russia to solve significant security questions bilaterally (that is, he is continuing in the tendency to try to establish the so-called strategic condominium), but he is also trying to deepen this tendency. This deepening will be discussed in the next part, which analyses the components of the USFSP. On the other hand, Obama is limberly continuing on in regard to the question of the installation of the third pillar. The author's interviews with a prominent consultative source for Obama in these questions show the correctness of the argument that Obama is moving towards a residual strategy in the question of missile defense. By this is meant the plan that if Obama does not succeed in convincing Russia to take up a desirable course of action in regard to Iran and, at the same time, the Iranian threat does not decrease, Obama can return to the third pillar plan - and this time with a stronger international legitimacy on the basis of practically showing the limits of diplomacy in regard to this issue. Such a course of action can be especially important in regard to maintaining the unity of the alliance at the level of the Bucharest Declaration, especially after the critical statements about the third pillar from the French President Sarkozy and the German Chancellor Merkel.

In all, we can evaluate the change of the administration in regard to this issue as follows: **general change** – a temporary (but not necessarily definitive) suppression of the third pillar and reframing it from a security issue to a political bargaining chip in negotiations, and replacing the original meaning of the previous issue with a radical vision of nuclear disarmament; **partial change** – a strong discourse on resetting relations with Russia in the context of a rather naive faith in the possibility of a lasting change in the Russian position in regard to the US and the West in general; **continuity** – efforts to extend arms-control regime of strategic nuclear weapons (efforts towards a new agreement in regard to another reduction (but not elimination) of nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles were started already by Bush during his meeting with Putin in Sochi in spring 2008); the endurance and even deepening of the strategic condominium, and only a nominal utilization of NATO in related questions (the NATO-Russia Council, the Bucharest commitment). Relations with Russia could be considered to be successful if complementary diplomatic interactions with Russia are set up bilaterally (nuclear-weapons arms-control) and multilaterally (NATO – missile defense, Georgia), if the plan to continue the regime of the control of nuclear armament is drawn up and ratified, and if Russia's ambitions in the area of Kavkaz and Eastern Europe (and partially also Central Europe) are counterbalanced. A direct and mediated (UN Security Council) synergetic pressure on Iran and North Korea from the side of the US and Russia, as well as advancement in the direction of almost complete nuclear disarmament (there are many reasons not to believe in the possibility of complete nuclear disarmament), would be a large but hardly attainable bonus.



## Iran

Iran is one of the two most discursively accentuated issues of the current US-FSP (Afghanistan being the other). Obama made two significant changes to the American policy towards Iran: 1) right after his accession, Obama successfully cancelled the Bush-created and (as a result) utterly counterproductive discourse on the so-called 'Axis of Evil' with the practical result being that the US can now separately work with Iran and North Korea. This course of action reflects the reality that Iran is the more politically complex country with a much bigger direct influence on the region; and 2) it is precisely on the basis of cancelling the discourse on the so-called Axis of Evil that Obama started to approach Iran with a broad-minded diplomatic attitude, compared with Bush's diplomatic boycott of Iran from 2002 until the end of 2008. The broad-mindedness of Obama's current attitude lies in him focusing on the US's entire relationship with Iran instead of beginning the relationship with a discussion of problematic points. More specifically, Obama abandoned Bush's demand for Iran to stop enriching any uranium as a condition for any negotiations between the two countries. The zenith of Obama's approach was his televised speech to "the Iranian government and people" and his later speech at Cairo University. So far, in this respect, Obama's approach to Iran is rigorously balanced out. He is trying to recognize Iran as a regional power (e.g. the US's successful invitation for Iran to take part in trying to solve the problem of Afghanistan in the Hague at the end of March 2009). In this respect, he surpassed all of the previous US administrations since the deposition of the Shah and the establishment of theocracy in 1979. An indirect result of this can now be seen even on the Iranian political scene, where, during the presidential elections, there appeared an unprecedentedly harsh and open campaign, and usually hidden conflicts in the framework of the theo-political elite were revealed. These conflicts went beyond the level of reactions to Obama's approach, as they were also related to the question of whether the regime itself will survive. Regardless of the results of the elections (the current president officially won), the ruling political apparatus was subjected to harsh domestic criticism. The violent break-up of the pre-election demonstrations of Iranians unhappy with the high likelihood that the presidential elections had been rigged, brought the conflict to a new level.

At the same time, we cannot forget the fact that the core of the confrontation cannot be reduced to the popular but inaccurate axis of conservatives vs. reformists. Obama accurately calibrated the reaction to the continuing development in the country, by which he made difficult (but did not stop) the possibility of the Iranian spiritual leader Khamenei and President Ahmadinejad discrediting the domestic opposition by connecting it to the US government. The post-election situation shows that there is now a break-up of the previous domestic consensus, which was formed in an alliance against the non-conceptual and short-sighted politics of Bush. The broadmindedness of the diplomatic approach that can now be designated as Obama's biggest device in his relations with Iran can, of

course, change into the biggest weakness of the USFSP both in respect of this issue and generally. Such a development could arise very quickly. It could arise when Obama, under domestic and/or international pressure (including regional pressure from the side of Morocco, Egypt, Bahrain, etc.), would have to narrow the current breadth of his diplomatic approach to focus on the problematic issues of Iran's nuclear and missile programs or react to Iranian provocation or a sudden problematic political situation (e.g. an increase in the testing of mid-range missiles, getting the know-how that is necessary for long-range ballistic missiles, any escalation in the dyadic relationship with Israel, Iran's ruling theo-political elite refusing Obama's approach and continuing in its confrontations, Iran rejecting or abandoning the planned diplomatic negotiations, or any serious escalation in the socio-political conflict).

It is precisely a movement towards a narrower framework for the American-Iranian interaction for at least one of the reasons mentioned above, which will happen sooner or later, that will lead to a very surprising conclusion. In spite of all the differences between Bush and Obama that were sketched out above in terms of a wider dialogue (although so far, it has been more like a monologue), Obama's USFSP will be defined by a very obvious continuity with the Bush era. If the US does not accept the idea of a nuclear Iran, which cannot be expected due to Israeli pressure, domestic American pressure, and misgivings about the regional security dilemma (although when considering the risk of proliferation, the case would unequivocally be less problematic than that of North Korea), Obama's basic structure of interaction will be the same as Bush's. In such a case, the utilized strategy of rewards and punishments (the carrot and stick strategy) would change only in terms of its scope. We can expect Obama's rewards to be greater (in accord with his general approach), but correspondingly, we can expect his punishments to be greater as well. Plus, considering the fact that the US invested a significant amount of political capital into stopping the nuclearization of Iran, the US's inability to stop this process would reduce the international-political influence and position of the US - not just absolutely but also in the US's relations with Russia and China, especially considering their obstructive blocking tactics in the UN Security Council.

In general, we can evaluate the changes in the administration in regard to this issue as follows: **general change** – a broadminded commencement of diplomatic interactions with Iran in contrast to Bush ignoring the country, and removing the preliminary conditions for establishing a dialogue; **partial change** – efforts to carry out the main diplomatic activity at the bilateral level; **continuity** – the carrot and stick strategy (Obama still has not used this strategy because he did not have to narrow down the framework of diplomatic interaction to problematic issues). The US efforts in regard to this issue can be considered to be successful if Iran eventually commits to placing its nuclear program under the monitoring and verification of the IAEA and its peaceful use (nuclear material would apparently be provided by Russia, and nuclear

waste would be sent back to Russia); the cooperation with North Korea is diffused in the areas of developing and especially testing ballistic missiles (Iran almost exclusively tests mid-range ballistic missiles for North Korea in exchange for North Korean know-how concerning the missiles); the regional security dilemma is overcome and a regional balance emerges, which involves, among other things, the suppression of the political ambitions of the Lebanese Hezbollah by Iran.

## North Korea

The developments in North Korea of the last few months present *the first direct threat* to Obama's administration. Just a couple of hours before Obama's April speech in Prague, Kim Chong-il managed to cloud over the main point of Obama's speech (the question of nuclear disarmament) by testing long-range ballistic missiles. The North Korean test was announced in advance, although the timing was surprising. In the framework of the test, the three-stage intercontinental ballistic missile Taepodong 2 flew almost 4,000 km, which is twice the distance of the Taepodong 1 when it was tested in 1998 (the previous test of the Taepodong 2 ended with a fiasco, but not even the last test was a complete success when the third stage of the missile was not jettisoned as planned). Although Obama tried to utilize this adverse act in his speech at the last minute in order to strengthen his claims of his support for nuclear disarmament, the timing of the test deepened the existing scepticism of international community towards this vision. In addition to this, the timing also drew attention to the most problematic part of the vision: the efforts towards nuclear disarmament in the context of rogue regimes that own and develop nuclear weapons and that operate outside of a related legal regime (the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or NPT). Obama had to react to this by confirming the significance of the deterrence strategy even for the future. Here, we can follow a distinct political (but not strategic) change from the policies of Bush, who would almost certainly argue by claiming that what is necessary in this situation is an effective missile defense system, and not the deterrence strategy. The crisis was subsequently deepened by the North Korean underground nuclear test of May 25, 2009, which, in contrast to the previous test, was successful. The strength of the nuclear charge was between 10 and 20 kilotons. In the further escalation, North Korea fired three surface-to-air missiles, and current news reports point to the possibility of preparations for another test of a nuclear charge, which would now be the third one.

Obama's reaction to the last test was precisely in his Prague speech, in which the president described the test of the Taepodong 2 as a provocation and promised to be hard in holding North Korea responsible for going against the UN Resolution 1718, which forbids North Korea from carrying out any activities related to developing and testing ballistic missiles. The new resolution of the UN Security Council from 12 June 2009 made sanctions tougher in

several ways, especially in the area of transportation of fissionable materials into North Korea and that of closing financial agreements with this country. As for the analysis of the current North Korean behaviour, the usually mentioned external reason (i.e. that North Korea wants to attract Obama's attention and increase the reward for a return to six-party negotiations - but according to Kim Chong-il, the country will allegedly never return to six-sided negotiations), which is now a part of North Korea's usual extortion strategy, can actually be seen as a secondary reason in this context. The main reason can be seen in the urgent need to stabilize the domestic political position of Kim Chong-il after his stroke and especially his current biggest goal: to choose a successor (the C.I.A. confirmed, on the basis of information captured by tapping devices and documents from 12 June 2009, that the successor will probably be his youngest son Kim Chong-un) and to get a military elite to support him. This is one of the reasons for why Kim Chong-il's continuing aggression is not only related to the area of nuclear and missile technologies, but also to the escalation of the tensions at sea (South Korea and Japan) and on the border between North and South Korea. It is evident from the rise in tensions that this is not a case of tactical rational calculation like the previous instances of tension, but of an existential matter related to the survival and reproduction of the regime.

It is precisely in this light that we can perceive the emptiness of Obama's strong discursive threats and the problematic nature of their possible realization. The first problem is general: Obama, with his emphasis on the diplomatic possibility of solving the North Korean question, created unrealistic expectations in both the US and the world. By combining this problem with the more specific problem (i.e. the existentially motivated behaviour of Kim Chong-il), Obama got into the absolutely least advantageous situation for solving this question in the span of several years. The hardest part for Obama is the realization that the possibility of overcoming the two problems of the situation is given by the development in North Korea and its activities and stances, and not by the actions of the US. The case of North Korea shares one common characteristic with the case of Iran, but in the case of North Korea, it is more prominent: the fact that Obama does not currently dispose of any worked out strategy in regard to these countries. What is more, Obama's own political capital and the American political capital in general are dependent on the steps taken by the ruling elite in both of the countries. North Korea, which has a rich history of political extortion and breaking its commitments and the reputation of a state that cannot be forced to uphold the basic principles of existing norms of international law through sanctions or military force (the geostrategic reasons), thus sets the most distinct limits to Obama's wide diplomatic approach, which was also discussed in relation to Iran. The issue of North Korea will also be the main test of Obama's multilateral abilities, especially his ability to create synergic pressure together with Russia and China. Conceding to bilateral negotiations with North Korea would be a cardinal error for the US.

Generally, we can evaluate the change in the administration in regard to this issue as follows: **general change** – the absence of any comprehensive strategy on the part of Obama in regard to North Korea can be evaluated as negatively as the sharp change in Bush’s approach to this issue (diplomatically ignoring the country and creating the so-called Axis of Evil → diplomatic negotiations on ending the nuclear program); **partial change** – Obama called forth unrealistic expectations in regard to the possibility of a diplomatic solution (including the use of coercive diplomacy and the functionality of selective sanction instruments); **continuity** – a basic carrot and stick strategy, but now Obama has the chance to show a punishment not just discursively, but also practically. The US efforts in regard to this issue can be considered to be successful if, in the context of a short time horizon, the UN Security Council carries out a synchronized implementation of new and harder sanctions against North Korea; if, in the context of a medium time horizon, North Korea is brought back to six-party negotiations, including confirming the previous concluded commitments, deepening them (especially by introducing monitoring and verification mechanisms) and preventing trade in nuclear and missile technologies; and if, in the context of a long time horizon, North Korea is denuclearized, which is an absolutely essential condition for at least growing close to Obama’s vision of future nuclear disarmament.

	General Change	Partial Change	Continuity
Iraq	Lowering the issue priority	Reducing the rigidity of the plan concerning the troops withdrawal	Tactical and operational levels, acceptance of political responsibility by Obama
Afghanistan	Significant increase in the priority of the issue and in the political responsibility	Regional solution – the Af-Pak Strategy	Steady pressure in the Allies, preference of the intra-NATO solidarity over really effective solution on the ground
Russia	Suppression of the third pillar and the use of the issue for arms-control negotiations and for concerted pressure on Iran	Significant discourse on resetting the bilateral relationship	Attempts to renew arms-control regime; the existence of the strategic condominium
Iran	Genuine efforts to establish diplomatic interactions; removing the conditions for the dialogue	Emphasis on bilateral ties, efforts to produce balanced commentaries concerning the domestic development in Iran	Basic strategy of rewards and punishments (as yet unused, still too early)
North Korea	The absence of a coherent strategy	The creation of unrealistic expectations about the applicability of a diplomatic solution	Basic strategy of rewards and punishments (as yet unused, though it could have been used already)

## Procedural Changes to USFSP

At the level of political and diplomatic resources and instruments, which are used by the Obama administration in the USFSP, we can see at least a partial change in every procedural aspect. The most profound change comes out of the differing world views of Bush and Obama. Although Bush was usually described as a realist and Obama as an idealist, this kind of categorization is misleading. Instead, we could designate Bush as a *rigid realist* and Obama as a *pragmatic realist*. In Bush's world view, one could see several uncompromising opinions, but these opinions paradoxically arose out of idealistic operational codes, which are based on simplified representations of international-political reality. This kind of Manichean vision was the basis of the entire War on Terror and the now classic phrase: "Either you are with us or against us." The result of such a position in regard to individual issues was analyzed in the previous part of the policy paper. In contrast to this, Obama is a pragmatic realist whose idealism is more discursively based but is not converted into practical activity (unlike that of Bush). Slogans like "Yes, we can" or frequently used humanistic images coexist in the case of Obama with hawk-like positions that in many cases surpass those of the Republicans (for example, the intensification of the use of unmanned Predator aircraft to attack the leaders of al-Qaeda and the Taliban in spite of significant "collateral" losses in civilian lives). The same applies to the area of terrorism. Although Obama does plan to close the prison at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, as he promised to do this during his election campaign, we cannot expect any radical change in the status of many (although not all) imprisoned extremists, as was indicated by Obama's introduction of a new legal framework on 21 May 2009. Probably the most surprising evidence of Obama's pragmatic realism was the fact that he put human rights on the back burner while propagating democratic values in the USFSP. As two details which are important in this context and which establish a general tendency, we can mention Obama's friendly handshake with Hugo Chávez, the authoritarian president of Venezuela, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Hillary Clinton's surprising remark during her visit to China that human rights would not be discussed because the US already knows China's position on the matter.

The change in the USFSP can plainly be seen in the symbolic politics of Obama's administration and Obama himself. Obama managed to compensate for his lack of both a coherent strategy and a harmonization of interests and goals until the present through a series of gestures, apologies, and efforts towards reconciliation. Although this course of action is not difficult to understand after Bush's government, it does not mean that it should become the symbolic centre of the USFSP or especially that it could stay in this position. There are three basic problems with this course of action: 1) the risk of creating a meta-narrative of the US as a weak and timid country that is

not able to push toward achieving its long term goals; 2) Obama's apologies and reconciliations were almost never balanced out with an analysis of the character and intentions of the American opponents (of the Russian, Iranian, Afghan, North Korean and Latin American political elites); and 3) Obama managed to raise the difference between discourse/style and actions/substance in the framework of the USFSP to an unprecedented height. In regard to analysing the instruments of the USFSP, it is necessary to reject the utterly unproductive, but often made, distinction between Bush as a proponent of hard power and Obama as a supporter of soft power. The reason for this is the combination of the two types of power in Obama. It is thus more appropriate to focus on Obama's ability to utilize the new types of soft power, as these were unavailable to Bush because of his rigid positions and his lack of international popularity. Obama is especially dependent upon direct and indirect public diplomacy, which is proven by Obama's video speeches that are strategically placed on the web portal YouTube or his ability to make speeches directly to the inhabitants of foreign states, thus mobilizing their support. Obama is the first American president since John F. Kennedy in whom the character of so-called *celebrity diplomacy* appeared and became deeper. Celebrity diplomacy is usually studied mainly in the cases of untraditional diplomatic actors (Bono from U2, Bob Geldof, etc.), but usually not in the case of a president of a superpower. Another change in diplomatic activities in connection with the change in the administration is Obama's prioritizing of special, uncommon, and non-routine diplomatic channels. The weight of ambassadors in key nations is reduced by the engagement of special delegates who have this work as their full time occupation and specialize in one concrete problem and in one country or region (Holbrooke for Af-Pak, Mitchell for the Middle East, Bosworth for North Korea, and Graton for Sudan; the only exception is Hill for Iraq, since he is an ambassador).

The last, most important and least expected finding is related to the question of the *preferred format* for the USFSP on the background of Obama's idea of *the desirable character of international order*. The intuitive assertion that Obama prefers multilateralism while Bush preferred unilateralism was already refuted as wrong in the first part of this analysis. American multilateralism could be categorized as nominal. Thus, it is not a deeply rooted normative preference. The cases of the allied interaction in regard to the issues of Afghanistan and Russia were already used as examples. Obama's preferred diplomatic format is *bilateralism*, and its crux lies in interactions with great powers, regardless of whether they are emergent (China) or once and future (Russia). The radical break can be found at the deepest level, that is, in the transformation of American preferences in regard to the matter of the character of the international order. At this level, in respect of all of the discussed issues, Bush was dependent on creating predominantly *informal and thematically specific coalitions of willing* both in places where NATO was not present (Iraq) and places where it

was present (Afghanistan). In many cases, the coalitions of willing were wholly informal (as in the War on Terror).

With the changing of the Minister of Defense (Rumsfeld → Gates), the first transformations in preferences in regard to this issue took place. With Obama's accession and keeping Gates and the central document, the National Defense Strategy (May 2008), in force, the original prioritization of the coalitions of willing was abandoned, and instead of this, Obama established a preference that had not been seen since the 19th century: that of *efforts towards a concert of great powers*. In contrast to the preference of a great power concert of the 19th century, Obama's efforts towards a great power concert are not multilaterally based, but instead they involve a *series of bilateral relations* (bilateral parallelism). The crux is the US's relationship with Russia and the efforts towards the creation of a new strategic regime that would be mutually linked with China in the realm of security. In the case of the relations with Russia, this bilateralism has the concrete form of the already analysed strategic condominium. In the case of China, manifestations of this bilateralism exist only in areas outside of security (the economy, or the focal point of the Copenhagen summit on global warming in the G2 interactions of the US and China). It is precisely this analysis that can explain an apparent paradox: at the thematic level, this analysis showed that the USFSP exhibits a large amount of continuity. At the same time, the conception of great thematic changes is taking place in the USFSP. The Czech Republic (as well as Poland) serves as a very appropriate example for showing how an originally overrepresented country in terms of influence in an American coalition of willing (in the case of the Czech Republic, missile defense; in the case of Poland, missile defense and Iraq) can lose its relative position and influence with the shift to the American efforts towards a bilateral great power concert (in the case of relations with Russia, the great power concert would be based on a strategic condominium as suggested in Obama's letter to Medvedev). That which at first sight looks like a change at the thematic level is actually a procedural change that took place while there has been a significant continuity in the thematic area.

## Conclusion

It was shown that the continuity and change of the US Foreign and Security Policy (USFSP) after the accession of President Obama can be studied at the procedural and thematic levels. The presented analysis argued that the change of the presidential administration in the US has been accompanied by many changes in thematic priorities. Analysed topics in this regard were Iraq, Afghanistan, Russia in the context of the control of nuclear armament and missile defense, Iran, and North Korea. The effect on NATO was seen especially in the area of the stabilization of Afghanistan and in the relationship between the US and Russia (missile defense), and it demonstrated Obama's scepticism in



regard to the strategic role of NATO. An analysis of key issues showed that in spite of the common belief that the USFSP has been completely changing, the transition from George W. Bush to Barack Obama actually embodied a high amount of continuity between them. Contrary to this, however, an analysis of the means of the USFSP demonstrated a large variety of changes, including the most fundamental one: the change in the conception of the character of the international system and the practical politics connected with it (the ad hoc Coalition of Willing → a new great power concert in the form of parallel bilateralisms).