

**AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 2012 : WHAT  
WOULD A SECOND TERM IN OFFICE OF PRESIDENT OBAMA  
MEAN FOR FOREIGN POLICY?**

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In American politics, a president's second term is generally perceived as offering an opportunity to assert oneself in the domain of foreign policy and, thereby, to make one's mark on history. Though he was an ardent critic of the policy of détente, which he said had legitimised the Soviet Union as the equal of the United States, starting in 1985 Ronald Reagan entered into a series of negotiations over the reduction of strategic arms. Similarly, Bill Clinton adopted a much more active posture with respect to Israeli-Palestinian relations at the end of his presidency. While his efforts ended in failure at the Camp David summit of July 2000, they nonetheless broke with his relatively self-effacing manner during the Oslo accords, which were signed at the beginning of his first term, in 1993. His successor, George W. Bush, also seemed to free himself from the influence of the Neoconservatives during the second half of his presidency by reshuffling his team so as to conduct a policy less marked by unilateralism.

The current president, Barack Obama, who will strive to win a second term in the elections of 6 November, does not seem unaffected by these considerations. During a private conversation with his Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev, last March, he explained that he needed time, arguing that once he was reelected, there would be 'more flexibility'<sup>1</sup>. This promise illustrates the commonly held idea that a president who has been relieved of the restraints of the need to be reelected is freer to carry out a more audacious policy. While the validity of this belief which is widely disseminated by candidates seeking reelection can be open to question, its application to a possible second term in office of Barack Obama is worthy of examination.

Foreign affairs have in fact marked the presidency of the former Senator from the state of Illinois. Beginning with the death of Osama Bin Laden through to the death of Moammar Ghaddafi and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, international crises have punctuated his four years in the White House, allowing him to hone his experience in a domain which in 2008 was considered as his main weak point. In view of the present economic situation in the United States, it is not a certainty that Mr. Obama can profit from these successes. Nevertheless, the international context remains especially unstable and the opportunities for

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<sup>1</sup> Ewen MacAskill, 'Obama caught on mic telling Medvedev to give US 'space' on nuclear issue', *The Guardian*, 26 March 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/mar/26/obama-medvedev-space-nuclear>

conflicts to arise are in no short supply. Hence, in order to better understand what might be the major contours of President Obama's foreign policy if he should be reelected, we should begin by dealing with the results of his first term in office, then study the proposals of the candidate and finally, look closely into the team which might accompany him in a second term.

### 1) A so-so first term

**In foreign policy, Barack Obama's greatest success was undoubtedly his decision to launch a raid on the Pakistani residence of Osama Bin Laden which ended in the death of the terrorist** on 2 May 2011. One should recall that this operation was especially audacious. To begin with, the presence of the al-Qaeda chief was not proven. According to analysts at the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the probability that he would be in his residence ranged between 60 and 80%<sup>2</sup>. Then the operating mode chosen by Mr. Obama – an assault by Special Forces rather than aerial bombardment – presented a certain number of risks. Vice President Joe Biden, the Secretary of Defense at the time, Robert Gates, and several military leaders were indeed rather skeptical about this option due to disappointing results such as the mission to rescue hostages from the American Embassy in Tehran in 1980 or the battle of Mogadishu in 1993. The question of the impact of such an operation on the tense relations between Washington and Islamabad was also a source of concern<sup>3</sup>. After intense deliberations, President Obama assumed responsibility for the raid and gave his backing for the assault on the al-Qaeda chief.

The raid in Abbottabad, carried out by Special Forces under the direction of the CIA, also underlined changes in the strategy of counter-terrorism in the course of the last four years. **Special missions of the Armed Forces and the paramilitary activities of the CIA drew closer together and became interwoven, thereby allowing the American administration to focus on targeted operations aimed at the terrorists and their bosses**<sup>4</sup>. 'Our best attack is not necessarily the deployment of large armies abroad but to bring to bear a targeted pressure, a surgical strike, against the groups which are threatening us'<sup>5</sup>. That was how presidential adviser John Brennan explained this change in strategy which has in particular brought about the weakening of the hard core of al-Qaeda in Pakistan and in Yemen, as well.

The death of Bin Laden undeniably allowed the inexperienced Barack Obama to assert himself as commander-in-chief. **Those successes in counter-terrorism have largely contributed to the creation of a positive image of presidential action in the**

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<sup>2</sup> Siobhan Gorman, Adam Entous, 'U.S. Rolled Dice in bin Laden Raid', *The Wall Street Journal*, 3 May 2011.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704569404576299500647391240.html?mod=>

<sup>3</sup> Mark Mazzetti, Helene Cooper, Peter Baker, 'Clues Gradually Led to the Location of Qaeda Chief', *The New York Times*, 2 May 2011.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/03/world/asia/03intel.html?hp>; Siobhan Gorman, Julian E. Barnes, 'Spy, Military Ties Aided bin Laden Raid', *The Wall Street Journal*, 23 May 2011.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704083904576334160172068344.html>; Peter Bergen, 'Sense and nonsense about Obama and Osama', CNN, 30 August 2012.

<http://edition.cnn.com/2012/08/29/opinion/bergen-obama-osama-books/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> Raphaël Ramos, *United States: Change of the Role of the CIA and of the Pentagon in the fight against terrorism*, ESISC, 11 September 2011. [http://esisc.net/upload/publications/analyses/united-states-change-in-the-role-of-the-cia-and-of-the-pentagon-in-the-fight-against-terrorism/UNITED%20STATES\\_%20CHANGE%20IN%20THE%20ROLE%20OF%20THE%20CIA.pdf](http://esisc.net/upload/publications/analyses/united-states-change-in-the-role-of-the-cia-and-of-the-pentagon-in-the-fight-against-terrorism/UNITED%20STATES_%20CHANGE%20IN%20THE%20ROLE%20OF%20THE%20CIA.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Ken Dilanian, 'U.S. counter-terrorism strategy to rely on surgical strikes, unmanned drones', *The Los Angeles Times*, 29 June 2011. <http://www.latimes.com/news/politics/la-pn-al-qaeda-strategy-20110629.0,7494157.story>

**domain of international affairs.** Nevertheless, this perception has recently been overturned following the terrorist attack on the American Consulate of Benghazi which, on 11 September, cost the life of four American citizens including the U.S. ambassador to Libya, J. Christopher Stevens. After this attack, the rate of satisfaction with presidential action in foreign policy fell 11 points according to a poll by *Wall Street Journal/NBC News*<sup>6</sup>.

In fact, this fall illustrated the doubts raised by the President's action vis-à-vis North Africa and the Middle East. During the 2008 campaign, Mr. Obama was committed to restoring the image of the United States abroad. During his speech in Cairo of June 2009, President Obama said he had come to 'seek' in the Egyptian capital 'a new start between Muslims and the United States', insisting that 'the cycle of distrust and discord must come to an end.' When he arrived at the White House, he reached out to Iran, sending a personal letter to the Supreme Leader, Ali Khomeini, in the hope of prompting the Islamic Republic to renounce its nuclear programme<sup>7</sup>. On the occasion of the 'Arab Spring', Mr. Obama decided, after some procrastination, to support the movement, calling upon America's long-time ally Hosni Mubarak to resign and participating in the military operation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in Libya.

It has to be said that the President's boldness in these instances has not been rewarded. The hand held out to the Iranian regime was rejected and the American administration was obliged to resolve to strengthen economic sanctions against Tehran. In the meantime, the Iranian nuclear programme has progressed. **The country's uranium enrichment capacity has even tripled since Mr. Obama assumed office<sup>8</sup>, a sign that the new approach recommended in 2008-2009 has not shown itself to be more effective than the policy of the preceding administrations.** On 11 September 2012, the attack on the American Consulate in Libya and the attack on the United States Embassy in Cairo seriously tarnished the achievements of President Obama. The attack in Benghazi, birthplace of the insurrection against Moammar Ghaddafi, showed that **the regime of the Libyan tyrant was replaced by a failing state which is unable to hold its own against the militias and the Islamist groups which developed during the civil war.** Moreover, the tepid response of Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi, who did not condemn the attack on the Embassy in Cairo, raised **serious doubts about the reliability of leaders who emerged from the Muslim Brotherhood and about their ability to resist the more radical currents which are criss-crossing the country.** As a sign of the irritation of the American administration, which is comprehensible in view of the risks taken by Mr. Obama in supporting the Egyptian transition process, negotiations over Washington's financial aid to Egypt were suspended<sup>9</sup>. More generally, **the series of demonstrations caused in September by the dissemination of a film hostile to Islam confirmed that the words and action of the American President had failed to improve the image of his country in North Africa and in the Middle East.**

**The policy of the Obama administration in the Middle East has also aroused concern and resentment in Israel, with a worsening of relations between the**

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<sup>6</sup> Konrad Yakabuski, 'Obama's slump in foreign policy polls offers a much-needed boon for Romney', *The Globe and Mail*, 19 September 2012. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/obamas-slump-in-foreign-policy-polls-offers-a-much-needed-boon-for-romney/article4555880/>

<sup>7</sup> Tabassum Zakaria, Caren Bohan, 'Obama's Iran policy shifted from outreach to pressure and sanctions', Reuters, 13 January 2012. <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Latest-News-Wires/2012/0113/Obama-s-Iran-policy-shifted-from-outreach-to-pressure-and-sanctions>

<sup>8</sup> Joby Warrick, 'Obama's policy on Iran bears some fruit, but nuclear program still advances', *The Washington Post*, 25 September 2012. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obamas-policy-on-iran-bears-some-fruit-but-nuclear-program-still-advances/2012/09/24/f51f9a04-fc21-11e1-a31e-804fccb658f9\\_print.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obamas-policy-on-iran-bears-some-fruit-but-nuclear-program-still-advances/2012/09/24/f51f9a04-fc21-11e1-a31e-804fccb658f9_print.html)

<sup>9</sup> Anne Gearan, Michael Birnbaum, 'U.S. aid to Egypt stalled', *The Washington Post*, 17 September 2012. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-aid-to-egypt-stalled/2012/09/17/36ef0402-00e0-11e2-9367-4e1bafb958db\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-aid-to-egypt-stalled/2012/09/17/36ef0402-00e0-11e2-9367-4e1bafb958db_story.html)

**two allies.** While many elements have contributed to this chill, the Iranian issue remains the principal source of tension between Mr. Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Jerusalem criticises Washington for a lack of support and for its passivity in the face of Tehran's nuclear programme. In September, Mr. Netanyahu formulated an unusually harsh critique of the actions of the American administration in which he explained that 'those in the international community who refuse to set down a red line for Iran do not have the moral right to put a red light in front of Israel'<sup>10</sup>.

The wars of Afghanistan and Iraq also occupied an important place in the 2008 campaign and in the foreign policy of Mr. Obama. **In the case of Iraq, the President, who was committed to putting an end to the American military presence in Mesopotamia, kept his word.** Combat operations of the American military ended at the close of the summer of 2010 and the last soldiers left the country at the end of 2011. Nevertheless, **ever since then Iraq has seen a resurgence of instability and violence which, according to a study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) raises the spectre of civil war**<sup>11</sup>. According to the campaign promises of the Democratic candidate, the disengagement from Iraq was supposed to make it possible to devote more resources to Afghanistan, which had been neglected by the previous administration. This happened with the dispatch of 33,000 additional soldiers as decided in 2009. In June 2011, President Obama, citing the weakening of al-Qaeda and of the Taliban, announced the beginning of the withdrawal of the reinforcements<sup>12</sup>. This transition is expected to stretch out until 2014, when combat operations will cease and the country's security will depend solely on Afghan security forces. Nevertheless, as in Iraq, the future of Afghanistan seems rather somber. According to recent work of the International Crisis Group (ICG), **in terms of politics and security, the country is not able to deal with the departure of foreign troops in 2014.** Given the fragility of local institutions, this deadline could cause the collapse of the Afghan state and a civil war<sup>13</sup>.

In the area of arms control, **President Obama signed the new START treaty (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) with his Russian counterpart at the time, Dmitry Medvedev** in April 2010. Within the framework of this agreement, the two countries are committed to reducing their arsenals by around one third, thereby reaching 1,550 warheads. Hailed as an historic achievement, this treaty constitutes the foundation stone of the 'reset' of relations between Washington and Moscow which was promised by the White House<sup>14</sup>. Though it reflects Mr. Obama's commitment to encourage the emergence of a world free of nuclear arms, this agreement has been criticised for its lack of ambition<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, as the Iranian and Syrian crises now show, it is hard to demonstrate that the Kremlin has adopted a more constructive attitude vis-à-vis the United States.

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<sup>10</sup> David E. Sanger, Isabel Kershner, 'Israeli Sharpens Call for United States to Set Iran Trigger', *The New York Times*, 11 September 2012.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/12/world/middleeast/united-states-and-israel-engage-in-public-spat-over-iran-policy.html?pagewanted=all>

<sup>11</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, Sam Khazai, *Iraq After US Withdrawal : US Policy and the Iraqi Search for Security and Stability*, Washington D.C., Center for Strategic and International Studies, 18 July 2012, p. xi. [http://csis.org/files/publication/120718\\_Iraq\\_US\\_Withdrawal\\_Search\\_SecStab.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/120718_Iraq_US_Withdrawal_Search_SecStab.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Ewen MacAskill, Patrick Wintour, 'Afghanistan withdrawal: Barack Obama says 33,000 troops will next year', *The Guardian*, 23 June 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jun/23/afghanistan-withdrawal-barack-obama-troops>

<sup>13</sup> *Afghanistan : The Long, Hard Road to the 2014 Transition*, Brussels, The International Crisis Group, Asia Report n° 236, 8 October 2012. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/236-afghanistan-the-long-hard-road-to-the-2014-transition.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Carol E. Lee, 'President Obama, Dmitry Medvedev sign Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty', *Politico*, 8 April 2010. <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0410/35522.html>

<sup>15</sup> Dimitri Simes, 'Is Obama Overselling His Russia Arms Control Deal?', *Time*, 27 April 2010. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1984882,00.html>

Lastly, President Obama's first term was marked by the **shift of the centre of gravity of American foreign policy towards Asia, and, in particular, towards China**. Nevertheless, in the domain of relations between Washington and Beijing, the situation has not truly changed, as we see from the recent admonitions of the American President relating to Chinese commercial practices<sup>16</sup>.

## 2) A campaign marked by domestic issues

**Considered as a strong point in the President's list of achievements, foreign policy occupied an important place in the launch of Barack Obama's campaign for reelection** last spring. Indeed, the President's team used the first anniversary of the death of Osama Bin Laden in a television advertisement raising questions about Mitt Romney and suggesting that the Republican candidate would not have had the 'guts' to launch the raid against the Pakistani residence of the terrorist chief<sup>17</sup>. Since then, the President and his supporters regularly use this theme to highlight the experience and the successes of Mr. Obama, particularly in the domain of the fight against terrorism, while attacking their opponent's vision of the world dating from the 'Cold War'<sup>18</sup>.

Nevertheless, **despite the positive perception of the President's achievements in foreign policy, it is worth noting that this theme remains relatively ignored in Barack Obama's programme**. These questions are not really among the present concerns of American public opinion in a campaign marked by economic and domestic issues. Thus, we note that international affairs do not figure among the main subjects put forward on the website of candidate Obama. Moreover, the part of his online platform devoted to national security simply – and very succinctly – mentions the withdrawal from Iraq, the prospects for withdrawal from Afghanistan, the weakening of al-Qaeda, progress towards a world without nuclear weapons and restoring America's standing around the world<sup>19</sup>.

**In his speeches, candidate Obama briefly mentions some issues of importance but does not give the content of what could be the foreign policy of his administration**. For example, when he addressed the Democratic Party convention, he mentioned the need to continue the fight against terrorism, to contain the European crisis and to stand united against the Iranian government<sup>20</sup>. During the United Nations General Assembly meeting, the American President spoke of his determination to deal with Iran via diplomacy but promised that the United States will assume its responsibilities of preventing from obtaining nuclear arms. He also timidly called upon Israelis and Palestinians not to turn their backs on one another<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Lucy Madison, 'Obama announces another trade complaint against China', CBS News, 17 September 2012. [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544\\_162-57514050-503544/obama-announces-another-trade-complaint-against-china/](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-57514050-503544/obama-announces-another-trade-complaint-against-china/)

<sup>17</sup> Chris McGreal, 'Obama campaign marks Bin Laden raid anniversary with Romney attack ad', *The Guardian*, 30 April 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/apr/30/obama-campaign-bin-laden-death-ad>

<sup>18</sup> Mark Lander, 'Obama and Democrats Point to Foreign Policy Strength', *The New York Times*, 7 September 2012. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/07/us/politics/obama-and-democrats-point-to-foreign-policy-strength.html?\\_r=1&hpw](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/07/us/politics/obama-and-democrats-point-to-foreign-policy-strength.html?_r=1&hpw)

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.barackobama.com/national-security>

<sup>20</sup> *Remarks by the President at the Democratic National Convention*, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 6 September 2012. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/09/07/remarks-president-democratic-national-convention>

<sup>21</sup> *Remarks by the President to the UN General Assembly*, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 25 September 2012. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/09/25/remarks-president-un-general-assembly>

One may thus conclude that **on the ‘hot’ issues of foreign policy, the action of President Obama in his second term would fit within and continue the lines drawn in his first term.** Diplomacy will be favoured to resolve crises linked to the Iranian nuclear programme and to the Syrian conflict. Targeted strikes will remain the principal tool of American policy in the fight against al-Qaeda. In Afghanistan, the calendar of withdrawal will continue even if the question of possible negotiations with the Taliban could arise. Meanwhile, relations with China also should occupy a major place once the new rulers are established in Beijing.

In parallel to these topics of current news, reelection could offer Barack Obama an opportunity to leave his mark in history through an international initiative. This is in particular what Ben Rhodes, speechwriter of the President and deputy adviser in the National Security Council, explains. According to him, **Mr. Obama takes his inspiration from the policy conducted by Ronald Reagan in his second term<sup>22</sup>. The fight against nuclear proliferation thus appeared as a theme that the President could seek to promote.** We also note that in April 2009, during a speech in Prague, he invoked the ‘moral responsibility’ of the United States to act to free the world of the threat of nuclear arms<sup>23</sup>. Contrary to the fears of the Republican camp, **Mr. Obama could adopt a more bipartisan posture by prioritising subjects which are less divisive such as climate change<sup>24</sup>.** According to Mr. Rhodes, the White House also hopes to be able to move along the peace process in the Middle East, which could justify the Nobel Peace Prize which Mr. Obama received in October 2009. Nevertheless, keeping in mind the context which is especially unfavourable for this type of initiative, the presidential adviser said that Mr. Obama would get personally involved in this issue only if the two camps showed they were ready to negotiate seriously<sup>25</sup>.

### 3) The team of a second term

To compensate for his lack of experience in the area of foreign affairs, Barack Obama chose in 2008 to put in place a team of hardened professionals, beginning with Vice President Joe Biden. Mr. Obama asked Robert Gates, the Secretary of Defense appointed by President George W. Bush in 2006, to remain at his post. He also called upon Hillary Clinton, who as a Senator had served in the Armed Services Committee, to take charge of American diplomacy. In order to coordinate the process of developing foreign, defense and security policy within the National Security Council, he brought in retired four-star general James Jones, the former commander of NATO forces.

Some members of this team, like Robert Gates and General Jones, have already been replaced by the President’s own trusted men such as Leon Panetta and Thomas Donilon. Others, including Hillary Clinton, have announced that they will not participate in a second term. **In the words of one member of the President’s entourage, the reelection of Barack Obama could be expected to result in a ‘widespread turnover<sup>26</sup>’.** Among the favourites to replace Mrs. Clinton are John Kerry and Susan Rice. The former, a Senator

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<sup>22</sup> Ryan Lizza, ‘The Second Term’, *The New Yorker*, 18 June 2012.

[http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/06/18/120618fa\\_fact\\_lizza](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/06/18/120618fa_fact_lizza)

<sup>23</sup> *Remarks by President Barack Obama*, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 5 April 2009. [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Remarks-By-President-Barack-Obama-In-Prague-As-Delivered](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-By-President-Barack-Obama-In-Prague-As-Delivered)

<sup>24</sup> Ryan Lizza, ‘The Second Term’, *op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> Matt Spetalnick, ‘Analysis: Would a second term mean “Obama Unleashed” on world stage’, Reuters, 24 August 2012. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/08/24/us-usa-campaign-obama-foreign-idUSBRE87NoT120120824>

<sup>26</sup> Darren Samuelsohn, ‘W.H. plans for a second term’, *Politico*, 8 September 2012. <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0912/80938.html>

from Massachusetts, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee and former presidential candidate, has in fact a lot of experience and the contacts necessary to head the diplomatic corps. Moreover, he is playing a leading role in Mr. Obama's campaign, being the principal Democratic voice to criticise the positions of Mr. Romney in foreign policy<sup>27</sup>. The latter, who is presently the United States Ambassador to the United Nations, is very well thought of in the White House. She is credited with having influenced the decision of Barack Obama to intervene in Libya and for her role in the United Nations Security Council deliberations on this issue<sup>28</sup>.

Nevertheless, the limited influence of Mrs. Clinton during her four years within the Obama administration allows us to treat lightly the importance of the arrival of a new Secretary of State and, more generally, the formation of a new cabinet. While the marginalisation of the Department of State in preparation of American foreign policy is not a new phenomenon, it has been especially accentuated during the presidency of Mr. Obama. From the organisational point of view, **the first term of Barack Obama has been marked by extreme centralisation of the decision-making tools in the White House**<sup>29</sup>. **The President has in effect relied on several young advisers who came from his campaign and who were outside the historical reference points which till now fashioned United States conduct in international affairs**<sup>30</sup>. **With the experience acquired since 2009 and the attachment of the President to operating with few outside input, this phenomenon could become still more accentuated in case he is reelected.** The members of the team who are close to Mr. Obama are thus expected to remain especially influential. Though he is said to have an ambition to take over from Mrs. Clinton, National Security Council adviser Thomas Donilon will likely remain in his post, like his assistant Dennis McDonough and like the President's speechwriter in the domain of foreign policy, Ben Rhodes.

#### 4) Conclusion

**As we have seen, the ambitious programme presented in 2008 by Barack Obama in the area of foreign policy has given contrasting results. While the future of Iraq and Afghanistan remains uncertain, the campaign promises concerning these two theatres of operations have been honoured. The death of Osama Bin Laden and the increased pressure on the leaders of al-Qaeda in Pakistan have brought indisputable successes even if the Sunni terrorist organisation remains an important factor of destabilisation in Yemen, in Somalia and in North Africa. At the same time, the new start promised in Cairo between the United States and the Arab-Muslim world has not taken place. The outreach to Iran has not upset progress of the regime in Tehran on the path to atomic arms which is closer than ever to realisation.**

**Like the current campaign, the term in office of the next President of the United States is expected to be dominated by the economy and by domestic issues. This would be particularly true in case Mr. Obama is reelected, because he would be**

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<sup>27</sup> Mark Lander, 'Obama and Democrats Point to Foreign Policy Strength', *op. cit.*

<sup>28</sup> James Traub, 'The Point Guard', *Foreign Policy*, September-October 2012.

[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/08/13/the\\_point\\_guard](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/08/13/the_point_guard)

<sup>29</sup> Raphaël Ramos, *Barack Obama's assertion as Commander-in-Chief*, ESISC, 18 May 2011.

<http://esisc.net/upload/publications/analyses/barack-obamas-assertion-as-commander-in-chief/BARACK%20OBAMA%E2%80%99S%20ASSERTION%20AS%20COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> James Mann, 'How Obama's foreign policy team relates to the Vietnam – or doesn't', *The Washington Post*, 22 June 2012. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/james-mann-how-obamas-foreign-policy-team-relates-to-the-vietnam-war--or-doesnt/2012/06/22/gJQakVWKvV\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/james-mann-how-obamas-foreign-policy-team-relates-to-the-vietnam-war--or-doesnt/2012/06/22/gJQakVWKvV_story.html)

**immediately confronted by the political consequences of the major worksites left unfinished during his first term. And yet, international affairs could prove as important for the country as the questions linked to the economic and budgetary situation. Syria, Iran and the prospect of an Israeli attack, the conditions of the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the consequences of the 'Arab Spring' and the change in relations with Beijing are in fact crucial subjects which cannot be avoided by the next occupant of the White House.**

**Faced with these uncertainties, during the first months of the campaign President Obama did not give any precise answers. He merely recalled his successes and attacked the positions of his adversary. Nevertheless, the results of his first term have allowed us to reveal a sort of pragmatism, as we see in the case of Iran. The dialogue recommended by Mr. Obama during his 2008 campaign in fact rapidly gave way to unprecedented hardening of the sanctions against the regime in Tehran, which today is in a very delicate situation. The ambitious line defended in 2008, with the electoral aims that were clear to all, was overtaken by the implacable reality of international relations. In case he is reelected on 6 November, one may wonder whether Mr. Obama, freed from electoral constraints, will continue on the path of pragmatism or will relapse into the failings of his first months in the White House when he conducted a foreign policy which was disconnected from realities because it was too ambitious.**

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