

## **THE PLACE OF FOREIGN POLICY IN THE DUEL BETWEEN JOHN MCCAIN AND BARACK OBAMA**

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### **1. Introduction**

Ever since 11 September 2001, security and national interests have never been so much at the heart of the American political debate. The re-focusing of American concerns in relation to the rest of the world has only grown and each candidate must take this into account.

The Presidential tickets have been known for several weeks now: Barack Obama and Joe Biden on the Democratic side; McCain and Sarah Palin, for the Republicans. Apart from the persons and some announcements, it should be emphasised that the two parties are not so far apart from each other in the area of foreign relations. The 2002 vote in favour of the invasion of Iraq was supported by a majority of Democrats and is the best example of this. In the past, “American interests” or what can be perceived as such have often transcended the divide between Republicans and Democrats.

Whoever he may be, the next occupant of the White House will have many international issues to manage but, above all, he must go about re-gilding the American coat of arms, which, over these past few years, has been tarnished by the Iraqi adventure and the recurrent accusations of violations of human rights brought against the American Army and intelligence services. He must also find political and security solutions to get out of the Iraqi and Afghan impasses. Nuclear Iran will also remain on the table insofar as a favourable solution that is acceptable to the allies of the West will not have been found. Finally, relations with the Russia of Dimitri Medvedev and with emergent China must not be forgotten, because the summer of 2008 once again demonstrated how much these nations can influence the world; the independence of Kosovo and the Ossetia crisis, as well as the Beijing Olympic Games are merely the latest proofs of this. As regards world trade and finance, the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States will have to achieve greater transparency of the markets and financial activity; in other words, it will be necessary to regulate the markets better.

While this finale of the campaign is dominated by the economic and financial crisis, and this will be far from ending when the oath of office is administered<sup>1</sup> on 20 January 2009, foreign policy will take up a fundamental part of the Presidential agenda.

## **2. The heritage of the Bush years**

### **2.1 The George W. Bush doctrine**

In 2000, during his first electoral campaign, George W. Bush defined an isolationist policy aiming at withdrawing American troops from the Balkans, limiting the nuclear arsenal and closing a certain number of military bases abroad. The 43<sup>th</sup> American President ran up against two major oppositions: straight away, the large companies operating on the world level and which had contributed strongly to his electoral campaign; next, the military men, surrounded by the armaments industry. They let Mr Bush know that the modification of the threat must be managed not by an isolationist policy but by increasing the Defence budget and maintaining bases abroad.<sup>2</sup>

The new strategy of national security developed during the year which followed 11 September, as well as the State of the Union speech delivered in 2003 left their mark on the whole Presidency of George W. Bush. During his first term, he based his doctrine on the concept of preemptive war, without the agreement of the United Nations. We make reference here to the American invasion of Iraq, which was greatly motivated by the fact that Baghdad had weapons of mass destruction. In this context, there was every reason to fear that terrorist groups could obtain arms in Iraq to commit attacks similar to those of 11 September. According to the American Administration, preemptive war was justified and the disarmament of Iraq was intended to eliminate a threat aimed directly at the United States and, indirectly, at all states which might be the targets of new terrorist attacks.<sup>3</sup> These *raisons d'Etat* were hardly persuasive and subsequently turned out to be erroneous.

However that may be, after Vietnam – when escalation was carried out under two Democratic Presidents, John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson –, George W. Bush initiated the second American war in less than 50 years, re-opening the ‘Viet Nam wound’ that had healed badly. To be sure, during the 1990s, American troops were the spearhead of the First Gulf War and participated in operations in Somalia and in the Balkans, but these interventions were either limited in time (for the Gulf War) or in the numbers of troops engaged (for Somalia and the Balkans). As a result, there was much less social trauma than with the war in Iraq, all the more so given that these expeditions were perceived as fundamentally justified by public opinion, which is not the case today.

### **2.2 History will judge the Bush Jr. years**

Whether or not he has been the most unpopular American President,<sup>4</sup> the analysis of the eight years of policy under George W. Bush cannot be reduced to just the Iraqi case. The major lines of his policy will be applied in the future, whatever the Democratic camp may say. Nevertheless, many critics remain disappointed that Mr. Bush did not follow the

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<sup>1</sup> *Inauguration day*: ever since George Washington in 1789, all newly elected Presidents take their oath of office at the Capitol, in Washington.

<sup>2</sup> Georges Le Guelte, ‘The world of George W. Bush and Europe,’ *Le débat* n°127 of November-December 2003, Paris, Gallimard, pp.18-19.

<sup>3</sup> Olivier Corten, *Le retour des guerres préventives : le droit international menacé* [The Return of Preemptive Wars : International Law under Threat] Bruxelles, Editions Labor, 2003, p.41.

<sup>4</sup> At the end of April 2008, the Gallup Poll gave him the weakest level of popularity (28% having a favourable opinion) since the measurements began, i.e., for 70 years. Philippe Gelie, ‘George Bush in his round of farewells in Old Europe,’ *Le Figaro*, Paris, Monday, 9 June 2008, p.8.

recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton report<sup>5</sup> published in 2006. In effect, it would have permitted the President to apply some bipartisanship and to open an international dialogue over this thorny issue.

Meanwhile, George W. Bush was unable to resolve all the open problems. Under conditions which were, at the time, much more favourable, like the current President, Bill Clinton was not up to the task of creating circumstances for a rapprochement with Tehran or bringing together the Israelis and Palestinians in order to sign a peace agreement to the Middle East conflict. The only difference between the end of these Presidential eras has been the impression left by the United States of George W. Bush on the rest of the world: as a country that inspires less hope and dreams.

As he departs from the White House, the former governor of the State of Texas leaves a great number of troops abroad, two ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, a colossal debt and a financial crisis for which the next President will have to manage the consequences. Whatever may be, the legacy of George W. Bush also has its positive sides. The military alliance signed with India is the result of negotiations that have lasted for many years. A treaty was signed between the two nations in 2007 in order to share information and materiel relating to civilian nuclear power and the United States will sell to India combat aircraft, warships and other equipment worth a total of 10 billion dollars over the coming ten years.<sup>6</sup>

International and trans-Atlantic tensions born of the war in Iraq are genuine but cannot obscure the fact that the Bush Administration was also capable of playing the card of multilateralism in certain contexts, notably with respect to the issues of North Korea and Iran. In these two cases, the United States reacted in concert with its allies. The European Union has, moreover, been able to become a sort of scout or intermediary in Tehran. Without any success to date, we must nonetheless note....

An analysis of the profile of the two candidates will allow us to better discern the main lines and the major challenges of the future American President. Whatever happens, we can expect more change in the continuity than continuity in the change.

### **3. The inclinations in international policy of the two candidates**

#### ***3.1 The robustness and experience embodied by John McCain***

Born in Panama (in the American canal zone), John McCain studied at the US Naval Academy. Presently aged 71, he has been married twice and is the father of 7 children. He has been Senator of Arizona since 1986.

The personality of the '*kid from Phoenix*' was influenced by his family and its political activities. His father and his grandfather were high ranking US Navy officers and he himself spent 22 years there before entering politics. Covered with medals, he took part in the Vietnam War, where he was imprisoned for 5 years under very tough conditions. In particular, he refused to be freed so as not to demoralise his comrades in detention. On the professional side, the 22 years he has spent in the Senate have left their mark on the former soldier and he was an unlucky Presidential<sup>7</sup>candidate against George W. Bush in the year 2000.

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<sup>5</sup> Report of the study group on Iraq, available on: <http://www.usip.org/isg/>

<sup>6</sup> David Frum, 'Bush's legacy', Foreign Policy, Washington, September-October 2008, p.32

<sup>7</sup> During the Republican Party primaries

John McCain is reputed to have fought against the influence of certain *K Street*<sup>8</sup> lobbies in Washington, but also for having submitted bills relating to electoral campaign financing. He is known for his penchant in favour of deregulation and he succeeded in polarising independents who did not necessarily vote for the Republican Party: in 1996, he stood up against the telecommunications lobby (AT&T). In 1998, he attacked the tobacco lobby. And in 2000, he was against the ethanol lobby. So much for those who have accused him of being close to private companies and lobbies.

In an America seeking change, the candidature of John McCain has often been criticised as being the perfect continuation of the terms in office of George W. Bush. However, the personalities and the experiences of Messrs Bush and McCain are extremely contrasting, and this attack is unjust, even if the common point between these two men fits them both within the political legacy of the Reagan years.

The years of the great communicator that Ronald Reagan represented marked the return to ideology and the entrance of the *conservatives* in government spheres. These conservative intellectuals who managed to inspire the President openly criticised Europe, particularly its lack of support for the United States against the USSR and its positions too favourable to the interests of Arabs and Palestinians. Finally, the major project of the antimissile shield that the present American President has wanted, under the influence of the *neoconservatives*, was, in fact, inaugurated by Ronald Reagan. His *Strategic Defense Initiative*, better known as the *Star Wars*, was one of the most costly military projects in history<sup>9</sup> but above all, even twenty-five years later, its effectiveness has never been demonstrated.

Would the policy of John McCain be 'Bush-ist'? Probably not. On the other hand, it would be more 'Reagan-ite' if the Republican candidate succeeds in returning to America its self-confidence.

### **3.2 Barack Obama : inexperience or youth and renewal?**

Born in Honolulu and aged 46, Barack Obama studied political science at Columbia University and law at Harvard. Married, he has two daughters. He was elected Senator from the State of Illinois in 2004 and he sponsored a bill permitting American taxpayers to know how their taxes are spent. He took part in the work of the Committee on Former Servicemen which supervises, in particular, the care of soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>10</sup> Since the beginning of his political career, Mr. Obama has always voted with the Left of the Democratic Party but, during the primaries, he, on the contrary, presented himself as a centrist who could attract independent voters, even Republicans.<sup>11</sup>

It is very difficult to 'classify' Obama among America politicians. It has to be said that his weak experience in the international field is offset by his *running mate* Joe Biden, *an old backpacker* on geopolitical questions who was still in the Caucasus several days before he was named. He will thus compensate for the lacunae of the candidate in matters of security and foreign policy.<sup>12</sup>

A vast team surrounds the Democratic candidate in order to give him the best advice in matters of foreign policy. At the head of this team is a triumvirate consisting of Susan Rice,

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<sup>8</sup> Most of the lobbying firms based in Washington are concentrated in this street.

<sup>9</sup> Which contributed notably to the collapse of the USSR.

<sup>10</sup> 'The position of the candidates on the main issues,' the Washington information service USINFO, 26 March 2008, p.8.

<sup>11</sup> Corine Lesnes, 'The American media wonder about the 'Obama mystery' and the haziness of its programme,' *Le Monde*, Paris, Saturday, 23 February 2008, p.4.

<sup>12</sup> Joe Biden has been a Senator from Delaware since 1972 and is presently president of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. <http://foreign.senate.gov/>

Anthony Lake and Denis McDonough. Aged 44 ans, Ms Rice was responsible for African affairs at the State Department under Bill Clinton, between 1997 and 2001. She was also a national security advisor in 2004 in the team of John Kerry. Anthony Lake, 69 years old, was a national security advisor between 1993 and 1997 under Bill Clinton, particularly on the issue of Rwanda. The third advisor, Denis McDonough, is 38 years old and acts as a coordinator in the campaign headquarters in Chicago. He was an advisor on foreign policy for many Representatives and a staff member of the Congressional Committee on Foreign Relations.

During the course of last summer, Barack Obama made a brief tour of Europe in order to show that he knew how to listen to and understand other decision makers of this world. And during this journey, the Democratic candidate above all convinced us of what he would not do if elected to the White House. It has to be said that there is a certain inconstancy in the positions that he supports. During the primaries, he defended protectionism and today he speaks about free trade. He spoke of withdrawing from Iraq within 16 months but later asked for a certain margin of manoeuvre on this brief deadline. After having threatened Iran, he proposed to go and have tea in Tehran or in Damascus. He told the Israelis that he was against any division of Jerusalem before making the opposite suggestions to Arab leaders. Last July the British weekly *The Economist* underlined the fact that what the Europeans heard from the mouth of candidate Obama perhaps did not match what the Senator from Illinois will do if he is elected President.<sup>13</sup>

Above all, we should not forget that Barack Obama's European success, however much it may help him as President, could do him a disservice as a candidate. It is not the Europeans who will vote on November but the Americans. When Mr. Obama speaks of himself as a 'citizen of the world,' these words sound fine for a European electorate but can cause pain in the ears of American patriots. Moreover, we note that Europe, its elites and its media have been invariably mistaken during the last few American elections and always chose the candidate who was not elected...

The warm reception accorded to Barack Obama in Europe and the enthusiasm which he has been able to arouse across the world should not obscure the concerns of countries like Turkey, Japan and Israel, which fear some of his positions. The authorities in Ankara hardly appreciate his support for the Armenians. In Tokyo, the Democratic candidate's criticisms during the primaries with respect to preferential economic agreements hit the Japanese hard, given that they are *exporters depending* on the United States. In the Near East, the Israelis fear the opening of dialogue proposed by Barack Obama to the enemies of the Jewish State.<sup>14</sup>

#### **4. The major challenges of the future President (*and the respective positions of each candidate*)**

Since the summer of 2007, the *subprime*<sup>15</sup> crisis, the slowing of the American economy that has become much more marked in the first half of 2008 and, above all, the collapse of the financial system at the start of the autumn have put the economy at the front of citizens' concerns. All of this puts back on the agenda the 'little phrase' that Bill Clinton delivered to George Bush Senior during the 1992 elections: '*it's the economy, stupid!*'

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<sup>13</sup> 'Welcome, Mr would-be President,' unsigned editorial, *The Economist*, London, 17 July 2008. [http://www.economist.com/opinion/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=11750395](http://www.economist.com/opinion/displaystory.cfm?story_id=11750395)

<sup>14</sup> Borzou Daragahi, 'Obama has captivated the world,' *Los Angeles Times*, Thursday 5 June 2008, p.3.

<sup>15</sup> Credit granted to a risky borrower and including conditions for recalculating the interest rates which could go up to a doubling of the reimbursement. These loans have above all taken the form of mortgage loans.

Recent bankruptcies of prestigious banking and financial institutions in the United States, but also the numbers confirming an increase in unemployment have benefited Barack Obama, who has reminded people how the last eight years dominated by the Republicans have been catastrophic for the national economy.

Though we may be far from the idea of minimising the international financial crisis, in this analysis we get down to pointing to several issues that have been less extensively treated during the campaign and which, nonetheless, remain the corner stones of the agenda of the future President.

#### **4.1 Iran**

It is not the first time that the Islamic Republic of Iran is brought into a Presidential campaign, since it was at the heart of the debates in 1980, following the hostage crisis at the American Embassy in Tehran during 1979-1980. Well before Mahmud Ahmadinejad, the present Iranian President, it was Khomeiny, leader of the Revolution, who burst on the scene and contributed to the heavy defeat of Jimmy Carter by Ronald Reagan.

Although the positions of the two present candidates converge on reduction of nuclear arms and better control of them, their position with respect to Iran diverge totally. While John McCain has many times stated his intention to strike militarily against Tehran in case of need, Barack Obama, for his part, has opened the door to dialogue. On the one hand, we may expect a sequel to the Israeli attack in 1981 on the Iraqi nuclear station at Osirak and, on the other hand, we fear Mr. Obama's offer to negotiate with non-democratic regimes.

The margin for manoeuvre is certainly tight: while it is clear that for years now Tehran has played the card of negotiations to gain the time needed to complete its programme, the military option could have disastrous consequences. The Arab countries of the region, all of whom are United States allies, are afraid, among other things, that the bombing of another Muslim nation might touch off a new conflagration, particularly if one considers the present arms held by the authorities in Tehran. But at the same time, the Israeli ally sees its security threatened and, as the Republican candidate said before AIPAC<sup>16</sup>: *'The Iranian determination to develop nuclear weapons is a risk that we cannot take for world security in general and for that of the Jewish State in particular.'*<sup>17</sup>

Barack Obama's proposal to bring Iran into diplomatic dialogue is perceived with a lot of circumspection in the United States. Since his speech in July 2007 in Charleston, South Carolina, the Democratic candidate has defended the idea of having talks with the Iranian, Syrian, Venezuelan, Cuban and North Korean leaders.<sup>18</sup> The young Senator from Illinois knows quite pertinently that he will not have the power necessary to ensure that Presidents Ahmadinejad and Assad renounce their aggressiveness towards Israel and that Raul Castro and Kim Jong-Il will forget their devotion to authoritarian Communism. The speech by the Democratic candidate is more a question of rhetoric than mature political realism. Confirming our idea, when Barack Obama addressed AIPAC, he hammered home that he would do everything in his power to prevent the regime of the mullahs from getting nuclear arms. Such a 360° turn shows how dialogue can have its limits when it turns to non-democratic heads of state.

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<sup>16</sup> The American Israel Public Affairs Committee. [www.aipac.org](http://www.aipac.org)

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan S. Landay, 'McCain, Obama inflate what's known about Iran's nuclear program,' *The Miami Herald*, Tuesday, 3 June 2008, p.6.

<sup>18</sup> Nicholas Wapshott, 'Talking to tyrants,' *The New York Sun*, 11 June 2008, p.2.

#### **4.2 Relations with Israel and the peace process in the Near East**

The Jewish State has always been a major topic in American politics. One element of American influence among all the others in the Middle East, the American-Israeli alliance is in no way different from that signed with Muslim Arab nations. The United States has strategic alliances with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar and Turkey. Each country receives, just like the State of Israel, some arms and military assistance in exchange for a promise not to commit military aggression against its neighbours.<sup>19</sup>

Much more than the influence of the Jewish electorate in the United States, this privileged relationship shows the great sympathy of the American population for Israel, since both nations have been built by immigrants seeking a better life: two communities shaped by destiny that look alike.

After having been heavily criticised by George W. Bush when he spoke to Israeli deputies gathered in the Knesset, Barack Obama tried to correct his aim during the speech he delivered to AIPAC in June 2008. He defended there the idea that Jerusalem should remain the *'unified'* capital of Israel and that the military option against Iran was still on the table. Furthermore, during his speech, he called for the isolation of Hamas, which is considered to be a terrorist group and which has taken control of the Palestinian government.<sup>20</sup> This was a way of *courting* the Jewish electorate and overturning his previous position on this issue.

As for the Republican candidate, he also addressed AIPAC at the start of June but he did it in a less committed manner, because the majority of the Jewish electorate votes Democratic. In his speech, aside from attacks directed against his adversary, he above all defended the stationing of troops in Iraq and a hard line on Tehran to safeguard the security of the Jewish State. Mr. McCain's speech perhaps was less pointed than that of the Democratic candidate but it had the merit of being more future-looking, with a comprehensive vision for the region. When speaking of Israel, the Senator from Arizona produces a more pragmatic vision which is certainly the fruit of long experience within the Army.

#### **4.3 Sustainable development, the Kyoto Protocol, the environment and the country's energy dependence**

For many years now one has heard that the United States is a threat to the planet as regards climate and that its failure to ratify the Kyoto Protocol is just the nth proof of that. However, it was not the sitting President who signed this Protocol but Al Gore, on 12 November 1998, in his capacity as Vice President. In the United States, for a treaty to come into force, the signature of the Executive branch is not enough; the Senate also has to ratify it. As Armand Laferrère emphasises: *'As regards the Kyoto Protocol, the Clinton Administration knew very well before signing it that it would never be ratified. In fact, as of 25 July 1997 the Senate unanimously approved a resolution (95 votes for and 5 abstentions) declaring that the United States must not join any Treaty which did not include specific target numbers for developing nations like China and India (which are entirely exempted from the Kyoto objectives) or which would represent a danger for the American economy. The Clinton Administration understood this message very well and never sent the Treaty to the Senate for ratification.'*<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Armand Laferrère, 'Is America a threat to the world?' Paris, JC Lattès, 2008, p.94.

<sup>20</sup> Noam N. Levey, 'Obama vows to bask Israel against Iran threat,' *Los Angeles Times*, Thursday, 5 June 2008, p.23.

<sup>21</sup> Armand Laferrère, *Is America a threat to the world ?* Paris, JC Lattès, 2008, pp.143-144.

The positions taken by the candidates with respect to ecology and sustainable development are not the same in the numbers and the means used to reach those numbers. In fact, John McCain, who is a great defender of nuclear energy,<sup>22</sup> wants to reduce greenhouse gas emissions without setting either a date or precise numbers, even though, quite recently, he mentioned the deadline of 2050. He also defends diversification of energy supplies in the country in order to be less dependent on foreign sources. His running mate, Sarah Palin, supports a programme of drilling in Alaska that encourages the nation's energy independence but would create an ecological abyss in the region. For his part, Barack Obama proposes an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050 and supports all the policies for using green energy.

The growing concern of Americans was shown during the campaign of the primaries following the exponential increase of the price of a gallon of petrol at the pump. The latter is even a symbol of the American index of satisfaction, since the population owns many vehicles and, above all, the price of a gallon has historically always been at a low level compared to the world average. The voters now want to have a President who is more respectful of environmental issues. It is undeniable that the 44<sup>th</sup> President will not be able to turn a deaf ear to their expectations during his term in office.

#### **4.4 A whiff of the Cold War and the future of relations with Russia**

Since 11 September 2001, we have seen the United States gradually take a place in Central Asia and in the Caucasus. The invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, the enlargement of NATO to include the former countries of the Soviet bloc as well as the strong American involvement in the oil stakes of the Caucasus and of the Caspian have gradually irritated Russia. The Russians saw an adversary take a position in their zone of influence and endanger their status as a powerful nation. The recognition of the independence of Kosovo, under the aegis of Europe and the United States, have served as the trigger for Moscow, which, since then over a number of times has shown its intention to assume aggressive diplomacy. The conflict in the Caucasus and the military manoeuvres in the Caribbean are the final proofs.

The Bush Administration may well refute a new Cold War, but it has been re-focusing its relations with Russia since August 2008. Russia is no longer a first tier partner as it was customary to present the situation after September 11. It has become or reverted to being an obstacle to US interests, a state prompting reconsideration, question marks and perplexity.<sup>23</sup>

Since the beginning of his campaign, John McCain has positioned himself in a strong position vis-à-vis Russia. In particular, he has advocated the removal of Moscow from the G8. He sees in the Russia of the start of the 21st century an *autocracy* led along a *very bad path* by former President Vladimir Putin. *'We want better behaviour from Russia on the international scene and we are right to expect that,'*<sup>24</sup> the Republican candidate said in particular, while his running mate, Sarah Palin, in an interview with the television channel ABC in September said that she would not be against an attack on Moscow in case of a new

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<sup>22</sup> 'Obamacain; policy differences ? Sure. But both presidential candidates are also surprisingly in sync.' unsigned article, *Los Angeles Times*, Sunday, 8 June 2008, p.2.

<sup>23</sup> Andrew E. Kramer, Clifford J. Levy, 'Rice, in Georgia, Calls on Russia to Pull Out Now,' *New York Times*, 15 August 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/16/world/europe/16georgia.html> Borzou Daragahi and Maura Reynolds, 'Harsh words heat up Georgia crisis,' *Los Angeles Times*, 16 August 2008.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-ossetia16-2008aug16,0,4516389.story>

<sup>24</sup> McCain and Obama on Iran, Russia and the security of the United States,' unsigned article, *Le Monde*, 27 September 2008.

[http://www.lemonde.fr/elections-americaaines/article/2008/09/27/mccain-et-obama-sur-l-iran-la-russie-et-la-securite-des-etats-unis\\_1100287\\_829254.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/elections-americaaines/article/2008/09/27/mccain-et-obama-sur-l-iran-la-russie-et-la-securite-des-etats-unis_1100287_829254.html)



aggression against Georgia.<sup>25</sup> In a word, the Republican ticket clearly shows its *neo-Reaganite* posture by considering Russia to be one of those disturbing American international interests.

As for Barack Obama, his position has undergone radical change. The Democratic candidate, who is a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and is busy in the Senate with questions of non-proliferation, initially showed himself open to dialogue with the Russians. Thus, in case he is elected, Mr. Obama, who is the same age as Russian President Medvedev, would envisage coming to an understanding with Moscow over an ultimate further reduction in arms. The Russian intervention in Georgia caused a perceptible change in the position of the Senator from Illinois. During his first televised debate with John McCain<sup>26</sup>, he said that ‘*a very aggressive and reborn Russia is a threat for the peace and stability of the region.*’<sup>27</sup>

The future of relations with Russia thus seems to emerge following a logic of graduated opposition, with an à la carte partnership, notably, in the issue of nuclear Iran. The return of a powerful Russia that is capable of disturbing American interests in the Caucasus, in Central Asia, in the Middle East and even recently in Latin America, with the rapprochement between Moscow and Caracas is what causes the positions of the two candidates to converge. The 44th President will thus have the task of managing a new Russian opponent which finds new levers for its authority in its energy strength.

## 5. Conclusions

Two visions of foreign policy oppose one another in this final leg of the electoral campaign, though some constants remain. We are not witnessing a *naive-multilateralist* candidate confronting a *McSame-unilateralist* candidate, by which is meant continuity of the leadership line of George W. Bush that the Republican candidate might embody. The nuance is in the analysis of power held by the occupant of the White House. To begin with, he doesn't all by himself decide the future of the planet. Besides, when the nation is indebted, weak, under stress and does not feel secure, as is the case at present, it has a tendency to close in on itself and to apply a foreign policy closer to diplomatic compromise.

One fact is certain: whichever candidate is elected, the war against terror will continue, because the only point that distinguishes Mr. McCain and Mr. Obama resides in the modalities to put in place in the future to ensure that this war is more effective.<sup>28</sup>

In the Middle East, the issue which will return very quickly to the table is Iraq. The Republican candidate will surely be obliged to withdraw part of the troops in order to respond to the expectations of the American population. Mr. Obama, for his part, will not be able to pull out all the troops within a period as tight as 16 months. If the country begins to stabilise, the positions of the two candidates will not be so different. If, on the contrary, we witness a new upsurge in violence, the choice between one or the other candidate will be fundamental. The vision of the two candidates is different, because John McCain bases himself above all on the military side, considering an immediate drawdown as a defeat, while

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<sup>25</sup> Michael Finnegan, ‘Palin talks tough on Iran, Russia in ABC interview,’ *Los Angeles Times*, 12 September 2008.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-palin12-2008sep12.0.3693136.story>, page viewed on 7 October 2008.

<sup>26</sup> Friday, 26 September 2008.

<sup>27</sup> ‘McCain and Obama on Iran, Russia and the security of the United States,’ unsigned article, *Le Monde*, 27 September 2008.

[http://www.lemonde.fr/elections-americaaines/article/2008/09/27/mccain-et-obama-sur-l-iran-la-russie-et-la-securite-des-etats-unis\\_1100287\\_829254.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/elections-americaaines/article/2008/09/27/mccain-et-obama-sur-l-iran-la-russie-et-la-securite-des-etats-unis_1100287_829254.html)

<sup>28</sup> ‘The best of enemies,’ unsigned article in “*The battle of hope and experience*”, supplement to the special edition on the presidential elections, *The Economist*, London, 4-10 October 2008, p.10

Barack Obama sees the economic side: an American withdrawal would permit the national economy to draw a fresh breath.

On Iran, the Democratic candidate recommends dialogue while his adversary does not want to meet with the Iranians so long as they have not stopped uranium enrichment. Another differentiating approach between the two candidates: Mr. McCain believes that the worse threat is not attacking Iran but letting it get possession of nuclear arms. For his part, Mr. Obama told AIPAC that he would do everything in his power to prevent the Iranians from completing their military project. The difference between the two candidates allows us to understand in which case a preemptive war could be applied ; it has to be said that John McCain will use a more muscular diplomacy and even perhaps one backed up by arms.

The old Cold War enemy, Russia, also has made a comeback in recent months to the American debates on foreign policy. The Republicans led by Mr. McCain apply a very hard line on Moscow and want to exclude the nation from the G8. For their part, the Democrats also have adopted positions which offend Medvedev-Putin by supporting the independence of Kosovo and holding to the idea of enlarging NATO to the East. Nevertheless, they want to create a new relationship making it possible to solve global problems such as non proliferation and climate change.

The economic and financial crises which are hitting hard at American citizens have dominated the debates at the end of the electoral campaign. John McCain still has been a fervent defender of the free market and his campaigns against lobbies are a perfect example of that. For his part, Mr. Obama speaks in a more nuanced manner while bringing up the commercial agreements of the United States in a globalised world which should better protect the rights of American workers.

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