

The "Clintonization" of Obama's Presidency

The election of Barack Obama is hailed in Western Europe as the coming of a political messiah who will solve all transatlantic and international problems and heal the wounds, which were hit by the George W. Bush's administration. However, this will probably not be the case, because Obama will not have the money, the time, the will and the power to change US foreign policy fundamentally. He might be a "prisoner" of economic and political pressure groups, which will give him little political leeway as major foreign policy changes are concerned. For the Arab and Muslim world, no hope for the better can be expected although in his speech before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) Obama promised "to do all I can to advance the cause of peace from the start of my administration". What kind of peace could that be? Will it be an American-Israeli peace, which Clinton proposed in Camp David in the year 2000? For sure, rhetoric and style will change under Obama but no substantial change can be expected regarding the Middle East. "Victory" in Afghanistan and Iraq is still on top of the incumbent's agenda.

Obama's election campaign copied JFK perfectly. After victory he imitates Abraham Lincoln what bipartisan politics is concerned and Franklin D. Roosevelt economically. But will he also live up to the expectations of his progressive and liberal voters? What he has to do first is to re-establish domestically and internationally the United States' political decency. Bush ruined not only America's reputation domestically but also worldwide. Obama may be seen as the embodiment of the wish by the American people, which was uttered many times on Election Day on TV. Millions of Americans were ashamed of George W. Bush because he established "totalitarian islands" within a democracy.. Obama defeated not only John McCain but also George W. Bush.

What should be Obama's priorities? He has to close down the prison-camp in Guantanamo and grant the more than 200 innocent prisoners asylum in the US and pay compensation for seven years of imprisonment without charge, restore the rule of law in the United States, get rid of the "war on terror" which serves only US-American geopolitical goals, bring those responsible for the illegal attack on Iraq to justice, sack all Neo-cons and Christian-fundamentalist lobbyists in the US-administration, and restore the economic and financial disaster of Bush's unspeakable political legacy. At least Obama's political opponent, Senator John McCain, paid respect and tribute to the new "commander in chief". When he congratulated Obama the conservative and Christian-fundamentalist crowd in Phoenix hooted and whistled. McCain showed political grandeur and fairness towards Obama. He reminded his ideologically blinded followers that Obama is now also his and their President.

Everybody likes to give the US President advices. What should the Europeans do? In Berlin, the candidate Obama received a warm and enthusiastic welcome. This does not mean, however, that the German government should be willing to send more troops and invest more money into a highly problematic cause in Afghanistan or elsewhere. Germany has already surpassed its military obligations. Europeans will also be well-advised to convince the new US President to withdraw his troops from Iraq and Afghanistan and start a diplomatic dialogue with Iran as he pledged during his election campaign. Whether the mullahs will be more conciliatory towards Obama has to be tested. Would not a withdrawal of occupation troops cut the Gordian knot in both countries? Many political analysts have stated very often that politicians in both countries would have settled their differences long ago without foreign troops on their soil. Why do not take the occupiers the advice which General Roberts of Kandahar gave in 1880 to the British? Robert Fisk the best journalist of Middle Eastern affairs quoted him saying: "We have nothing to fear from Afghanistan, and the best thing to do is to leave it as much as possible to itself... I feel sure I am right when I say that the less the Afghans see of us, the less they will dislike us." <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/fisk/kabul-30-years-ago-and-kabul-today-have-we-learned-nothing-1029920.html>

President-elect Obama's first decision shows the direction in which the new administration is heading in the Middle East. The appointment of Congressman Rahm Emanuel as his chief of staff sends an ominous message to Muslims and the Arab world. During his election campaign Obama did not visit a mosque, and two Muslim women wearing headscarves were removed from the stage where he was going to speak. The appointment of Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State also suggests that he considers the Muslim world as an adversary, if not an enemy. Nothing will change for Iran, it might even get worse. The rhetoric of Hillary Clinton towards that country during the Primaries was frightening. Did she not speak of the ability to "totally obliterate" Iran, if the country would attack Israel with nuclear weapons? <http://sbk.online.wsj.com/article/SB122729889963548689.html>

At all government levels the "Clintonites" and even some "Bushites" are taking over Obama's presidency. Obama does not only install a former First Lady but inherits also Bill Clinton's problematic legacy. There will be some change of personnel but only minor change in politics: With the Clintonites and remnants of Bushites there will be new wine in old skins. The power will stay with the old elite.

European public opinion hailed Obama because he did not belong to the WASP elite. They naively interpreted it as an endorsement of the American dream. Against this background, the Bush years appeared as an aberration from the myth of the land of boundless opportunities. Bush's presidency shattered this image, and Obama just came at a right time to fix it again or keep it going for a while. Nobody should expect that Obama would transform the US into a welfare state. If he is lucky he can get health insurance for the more than 40 million uninsured Americans.

The people who will determine the future US foreign policy do not stand for an end of the "war on terror" but for its continuation. Obama will, therefore, be a more "manageable" commander-in-chief for his European partners. His rhetoric is not black-and-white like Bush's one. The reasons for criticizing American government policy will not vanish. That is why Europeans may be further accused of being "anti-American", something which has never been the case. They were just fed up with George W. Bush like the large majority of the American people, too.

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