

# OBAMA'S FOREIGN POLICY LEGACY

## RETREAT OR REPOSITIONING?

*Alessandro Scheffler Corvaja*



Alessandro Scheffler Corvaja is a Research Associate at the Bundeswehr University Munich and at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies.

Barack Obama's election to President of the United States raised hopes all around that it would produce a transformation in U.S. foreign and particularly security policy. Employing a rhetoric modelled on that of liberal President Wilson and focusing on diplomacy, inclusion and, not least, restraint, Obama appeared to be the long-awaited counterpart to his predecessor George W. Bush, whose foreign policy conduct even drew criticism from his own followers towards the end.<sup>1</sup> While, as Christoph von Marschall rightly notes, Obama's election campaign with its slogans "Yes We Can", "Hope" and "Change" may have been aimed first and foremost at domestic rather than foreign policy, his followers at home and abroad had expected a fundamental change in policy with respect to foreign affairs as well.<sup>2</sup> After all, he received the Nobel Peace Prize though he had hardly been in office for a year.

Now that the challengers of the next U.S. election campaign are beginning to stake out their positions, the time has come to take preliminary stock of the results of Barack Obama's presidency in the area of foreign policy. As has been the case for all previous U.S. presidents, there is the question of the legacy. In Obama's case, frequent discussions on this topic have focused on subjects such as the gradual normalisation of relations with Cuba as well as the nuclear agreement with Iran and the conclusion of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade agreement.

- 1 | In the end, President Bush's approval rating only was at 22 per cent. "Bush's Final Approval Rating: 22 Percent", *CBS News*, 16 Jan 2009, <http://cbsnews.com/news/bushs-final-approval-rating-22-percent> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).
- 2 | Cf. Christoph von Marschall, "Obamas Außenpolitik", *Internationale Politik*, No. 5, Sep-Oct 2014, p. 68. For an excellent analysis of the development of Obama's speeches on foreign policy cf. also James Traub, "When did Obama give up?", *Foreign Policy*, 26 Feb 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/26/when-did-obama-give-up-speeches> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

Rather than homing in on specific aspects, this article will attempt to gain a broader view of the likely legacy of Obama's presidency in the area of security policy and examine the claims the President made when he took office, what he has achieved, and which challenges this legacy will produce for his successor's security and defence policy.

### **OBAMA'S POLICY OF RESTRAINT – A PROBLEMATIC RECORD**

When he took office in 2008, Obama attempted to realign U.S. foreign and security policy, focusing on diplomacy, reconciliation and restraint. Prominent points on his agenda included a "reset" with Russia after the Georgian crisis – including a reduction in nuclear weapons and project "Global Zero" – as well as reconciliation with the Muslim world – one should recall his speech in Cairo in this context – and a conclusion to the conflicts in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the same time, the USA wanted to re-establish its role as a reliable and solid partner in relation to its traditional allies, backtracking from the unilateralist tendencies of the preceding government. This would, however, require that partners play their role and take on greater responsibility, particularly in regard to regional issues.



French combat units at a ceremony on the occasion of the start of the U.S. anti-terrorist operation Barkhane in the Sahel region in July 2014: More responsibility for partners was an essential part of Obama's strategy. | Source: Martin S. Bonner, U.S. Army Africa, flickr ©.

Many experts view the outcome of these projects as disastrous. It is not for nothing that Patrick Keller describes the results of Obama's period in office as the "Obama debacle":<sup>3</sup> Syria and Iraq have descended into a nightmare under the attacks from the so-called Islamic State and threaten to draw the USA back into the conflict more intensely. Relations with Russia have reverted to a state similar to that during the Cold War, and Ukraine is another failing state now in need of assistance. China is acting with increasing ruthlessness and aggression in Asia, and the achievements made

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through the USA's engagement in Afghanistan remain vanishingly small. Other initiatives from the early stage of the presidency such as global nuclear disarmament or a resolution to the Middle East conflict appear absurd rather than ambitious seven years on. In an article for the *Foreign Policy* magazine, William Inboden says in summary that the only countries where the United States now has better relations than in January 2009 are Myanmar, Iran, and Cuba.<sup>4</sup> Nor does the President rate particularly highly in the estimation of the American public: In recent surveys, approval ratings for Obama's foreign policy were no greater than around 37 per cent.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, the President's national security apparatus continue to remain under pressure. Just recently, with the expiry of the "Patriot Act", the intelligence services lost a considerable portion of their powers – far beyond the reforms planned by the administration – and the Senate is writing letters to foreign heads of state seeking to undermine the President's negotiations. While the third Secretary of Defense has now taken office, the fundamental budget problems of the military have remained unresolved and are becoming more serious each year; added to this is the ever-present threat of the so-called sequester hanging over the military.

3 | Patrick Keller, "Das Obama-Debakel", *Internationale Politik*, No. 6, Nov-Dec 2014, p. 126.

4 | William Inboden, "The Obama Legacy and the Next Two Years", *Foreign Policy*, 20 Jan 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/01/20/pre-butting-the-state-of-the-union> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

5 | Survey conducted by *The New York Times/CBS News* in the period from 28 to 31 May 2015 among 1,022 adults in the USA. The question was: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling foreign policy?. *The New York Times/CBS News*, "Poll", <https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.documentcloud.org/documents/2091162/poll-may-28-31.pdf> (accessed 2 Jul 2015). Cf. "How the Poll Was Conducted", *The New York Times*, 3 Jun 2015, <http://nyti.ms/1G8ZLbP> (accessed 2 Jul 2015) for the methodology.

## **WEAKNESS OR REALISM?**

### **OBAMA'S FOREIGN POLICY GUIDELINES**

2015 has brought a summer of significant achievement for Obama with the approval of ObamaCare, the Yes to same sex marriage and the Trade Promotion Authority bill being signed into law. But with less than a year to go before the end of his second term, in the area of security policy primarily seems to leave his successor with a large number of unresolved problems. While no one would go so far as to consider Obama solely responsible for causing these problems, most critics direct considerable blame at his policy of restraint. The accusation in this context is mainly one of omission: if the USA had intervened in many crises more decisively and earlier and demonstrated greater "leadership" at important junctures, this situation may not have arisen. At the core of most of the evaluations is an analysis according to which American weakness had, in fact, allowed these crises to develop in the first place or even provoked them. So is Obama a president of weakness, who has above all shirked responsibility? To understand this criticism requires an understanding of Obama's foreign policy principles.

Obama's most significant fundamental assumption in 2015 is clearly a recognition of the country's limitations – and many see this as a direct consequence of the failures experienced in recent years.<sup>6</sup> From this perspective, it seems that the United States can rarely achieve one hundred per cent success and usually has to be content with "singles" and "doubles" rather than "home runs", as Obama attempts to put it in baseball terms.<sup>7</sup> As he stated in a much-noticed interview with *Vox* magazine this spring, the main idea is to "take the victories where you can" and to "make things a little bit better rather than a little bit worse".<sup>8</sup> In informal discussions with journalists, some from Obama's entourage used the

6 | Cf. Doyle McManus, "Obama's sadder but wiser foreign policy", *Los Angeles Times*, 10 Feb 2015, <http://latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-mcmanus-obama-foreign-policy-20150211-column.html> (accessed 14 Jul 2015).

7 | Cf. Juliet Eilperin, "Obama lays out his foreign policy doctrine: Singles, doubles and the occasional home run", *The Washington Post*, 28 Apr 2014, <http://wapo.st/1JhIZF5> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

8 | Barack Obama, interview by Matthew Yglesias, 23 Jan 2015. "The Vox Conversation: Obama, Part two: Foreign Policy", *Vox*, 9 Feb 2015, <http://vox.com/a/barack-obama-interview-vox-conversation/obama-foreign-policy-transcript> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

phrase “Don’t do stupid shit” to describe his strategy.<sup>9</sup> Obama himself therefore describes his foreign policy as realistic in the proper sense, i.e. characterised by the limited achievability of many of its classic objectives. This restraint goes so far that Obama’s Security Advisor Susan Rice has increasingly been making reference to the concept of “strategic patience”, a phrase that tends to be used in Washington to refer to Europeans making excuses. In response to the emphasis on this idea in the new National Security Strategy from this February, observers have already joked that this could have been Germany’s White Book.<sup>10</sup>



A U.S.-Iraqi police patrol in Basra in 2010: The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have resulted in a U.S. commitment in the region lasting for years – including numerous casualties and expenses in the billions. | Source: Adelita Mead, U.S. Army, flickr ©<sup>11</sup>.

This mantra of restraint and “Don’t do stupid shit” is diametrically opposed to traditional conceptions of American foreign policy. When the Republican senator and presidential candidate Lindsey Graham stated at the Munich Security Conference that arms deliveries to Ukraine will make him “feel better”, the difference to Obama’s thinking could not be greater. By pursuing this approach

9 | Mark Landler, “In Obama’s Speeches, a Shifting Tone on Terror”, *The New York Times*, 31 May 2014, <http://nyti.ms/1nQvGUP> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

10 | Cf. Jackson Janes, “The Struggle to Define a Leadership Agenda”, American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, 10 Feb 2015, <http://aicgs.org/issue/the-struggle-to-define-leadership> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

of restrained positioning, which his opponents frequently interpret as hesitation, Obama is ultimately fulfilling precisely what he promised during his 2008 election campaign. After the expansionist years of the Bush administration, this agenda was originally welcomed by many experts. The urgent need for a repositioning – combined with Obama's focus on domestic policy under the motto of "nation building at home" – extended across all political camps at that time.

Most observers had, however, linked the repositioning concept with the idea that the United States would re-enter the global arena in a similar role as before after a period of introspection, merely freed from the unilateralist impulses of the 2000s. In that case, the repositioning would simply have represented a classic phase of retrenchment, taking its place in the usual American wavering between isolationism and expansionism.<sup>11</sup> But any analyst of Obama's stance described above will soon recognise that the current policy was never considered a phase but is based on a much more fundamental modesty with respect to Obama's own ambitions – a modesty that has grown over the years.

While Obama made it clear in the above-mentioned interview with *Vox* that having a realistic view of what is feasible in the area of foreign politics does not equate to an admission of retreat by the USA, that is of course precisely what his opponents believe. It is here where we can find the most fundamental problem with Obama's approach: most Americans are still convinced that the world is in dire need of American leadership. The concept of American exceptionalism, i.e. the idea that the USA has a special role and responsibility in the world, is still deeply engrained in the American psyche. Obama has also tried to solve this dilemma in a typically American way: by emphasising the role of partners.<sup>12</sup>

11 | Cf. Raymond Aron, *Die imperiale Republik. Die Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika und die übrige Welt seit 1945*, Stuttgart/Zürich, 1975.

12 | In this context, note the focus on partners in the 2010 *Quadrennial Defense Review* von 2010: "The United States will remain the most powerful actor but must increasingly cooperate with key allies and partners if it is to sustain stability and peace [...]" U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report. February 2010*, p. iii, [http://defense.gov/qdr/images/QDR\\_as\\_of\\_12Feb10\\_1000.pdf](http://defense.gov/qdr/images/QDR_as_of_12Feb10_1000.pdf) (accessed 2 Jul 2015). Regarding the President's own view reference is made to a speech he made in May 2014: Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President at the United States Military Academy Commencement Ceremony", West Point, New York, U.S. Military Academy-West Point, speech, 28 May 2014, <https://whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/05/28/remarks-president-united-states-military-academy-commencement-ceremony> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

As mentioned above, American foreign policy undergoes a regular cycle of expansion and subsequent retrenchment. While the USA is always prepared to claim the lead role which goes hand in hand with its special capabilities in times of expansion, the call for a stronger engagement by its allies has been a recurring pattern in times of "retreat" such as the present.<sup>13</sup> From Obama's perspective, American "leadership" therefore means "wherever possible leveraging other countries, other resources, where we're the lead partner because we have capabilities that other folks don't have. But that way there's some burden-sharing and there's some ownership for outcomes".<sup>14</sup>

Strong partners should therefore shoulder the main burden, while the United States limits itself to a supporting role. This concept of "leading from behind", which has been positively derided, has proved to be a chimera as well during Obama's latter term. It

**Obama's strategy of Leading from behind proved to be an illusion, as the militarily well-equipped Turkey, Jordan and Saudi-Arabia were not able to prevent the catastrophic failure of an entire region.**

is the case that the USA has succeeded in enhancing the contributions of its own partners and even in handing leadership over to them in some cases – Germany's role in Ukraine is a case in point here. But in the Middle East in particular, these partners were not able to prevent the catastrophic failure of an entire region, although they included some militarily well-equipped regional powers such as Turkey, Jordan and Saudi-Arabia. In Libya, where France and the UK in particular had involved the United States despite its initial resistance, the state practically fell apart after the intervention had ended, with the Europeans looking on from the sidelines. The situation is even worse in the weaker states, where the USA wanted to provide support to governmental and above all military structures through massive investments. In the case of Iraq, the U.S. Secretary of Defense has by now come to accuse the military of cowardice in battle; in Afghanistan, the USA has had to deal with an occasionally openly hostile government for years, and in even more hopeless countries such as Somalia or Yemen, progress has been modest or non-existent. Despite the vast sums poured into the American Train & Equip programs, the USA has not succeeded in creating solid structures in these states.

13 | Cf. Derril Driver, "Burden Sharing and the Future of NATO: Wandering Between Two Worlds", U.S. Army War College Fellowship Paper, 2015.

14 | Obama, n. 8.

## THE FIRST LEGACY: WHICH LEADERSHIP ROLE FOR THE USA?

Obama's restrained security policy will pose a dilemma for his successor with respect to the positioning of the United States. The way foreign policy crises developed during his time in office shows that following a clear policy of restraint does not remain without consequences for a world power. As described above, considerable numbers of Americans make the failure to provide leadership under the Obama administration implicitly responsible for the negative events happening around the world over the last few years. While people generally agree that the USA should remain an important country providing "leadership", there is fundamental disagreement over what concrete form this leadership role should take. Despite all the criticism in Obama's restrained foreign policy, many U.S. citizens share his doubts about the scope of action for the U.S. and are particularly sceptical about large-scale military operations.<sup>15</sup>

This dilemma is also reflected in the current presidential election campaign. On the one hand, the Republican candidates are outdoing each other in their calls for "strength"; even the Republican wing under Rand Paul, which was demonstrating a strongly isolationist tendency just last year, is slowly feeling the pressure and is increasingly moving its focus away from foreign policy to criticising the intelligence services.<sup>16</sup> Most candidates are also becoming surprisingly tight-lipped with regard to greater details about how this strength is to manifest precisely. When pressed for an answer, they ultimately only mention even more sanctions, training, equipment and more air raids – in other

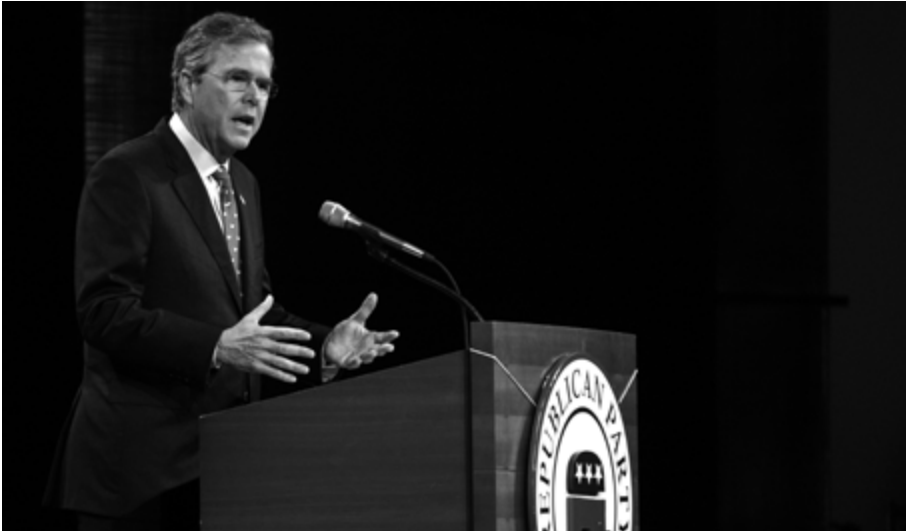
**Many presidential candidates envision a U.S. foreign policy strategy based on "strength" that would manifest in an increase in sanctions, training, equipment and air raids – in other words: more of the same.**

15 | While significantly more Americans now indicate their approval of the deployment of ground forces in Iraq compared to a year ago, the approval rate drops to 26 per cent as soon as a larger deployment is involved. (The Marist College Institute for Public Opinion conducted a survey commissioned by NBC News on 11 and 12 Feb 2015 among 603 adult Americans. The question was "When it comes to combating ISIS, the Islamic State group, do you support the United States:" with the options "Sending a large number of U.S. ground forces", "Sending a limited number of U.S. ground forces" and "Not sending U.S. ground forces at all".) *NBC News/Marist Poll*, 12 Feb 2015, [http://maristpoll.marist.edu/wp-content/misc/usapolls/us150211/Complete%20NBC%20News%20Marist%20Poll\\_National\\_February%202015.pdf](http://maristpoll.marist.edu/wp-content/misc/usapolls/us150211/Complete%20NBC%20News%20Marist%20Poll_National_February%202015.pdf) (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

16 | Cf. Manu Raju, "Rand Paul to lay out foreign policy vision", *POLITICO*, 23 Oct 2014, <http://politico.com/story/2014/10/rand-paul-foreign-policy-112126.html> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).



words: more of the same. Anyone even vaguely suspected of seeking to reintroduce the interventionist policies of Obama's predecessor – like Jeb Bush a few months ago – must reckon with an immediate strong and often very personal adverse response.



Jeb Bush gives a speech in Des Moines, Iowa, in May 2015: Even his own brother was forced to distance himself from the foreign policy of George W. Bush. | Source: John Pemble, flickr ©©©.

At the same time, Obama's policy of delegating security responsibility to the alliance partners has failed. While some allies were simply overtaxed by the sudden responsibility, others have increasingly turned away from the USA because of the lack of support. How it will be possible for the USA to return to its previous leadership strength without simultaneously shouldering the majority of the burden for global security yet again will no doubt remain the most interesting question in the upcoming American presidential election campaign.

#### **THE SECOND LEGACY:**

##### **A SECURITY APPARATUS IN NEED OF REFORM**

While Obama has moved away from the transformative approaches of his initial years in office, his restraint in the area of U.S. foreign policy sets him apart as well. One significant consequence of this has been that many of his experienced foreign policy advisors and officials have maintained (and still maintain) views that are diametrically opposed to his own. Obama's response has been to

also restrict himself increasingly to his closest circle of advisors in the White House where matters of foreign policy are concerned. In doing so he has curtailed the influence of the NSC in particular. Of course this has also had the effect of disabling the crucial coordination function of this body – particularly important in the vast and complex American system. Consequently, many institutions are now following their own agendas, frequently resulting in last-minute power struggles between the White House and the federal departments, which required direct intervention from the Oval Office to be resolved. Daniel Rothkopf, one of the most well-respected critics of the American security apparatus, therefore describes the most recent phase under Barack Obama and his Security Advisor Susan Rice as a “particularly dysfunctional period for the NSC”. Besides his criticism of Obama, who he says prefers to listen to political advisors rather than foreign policy experts, he homes in particularly on Susan Rice, who comes across as a very difficult and combative person.<sup>17</sup> Whoever will succeed Obama will therefore have to face the challenge of once again bringing to bear the traditional strength of the U.S. security apparatus – in fact the envy of many other countries – with greater effectiveness than in recent years.

One of the greatest unresolved issues of American security policy remains the future of the military, which is suffering from the budget cuts of recent years. Under the 2011 “Budget Control Act”, the USA will have to

**Based on the Budget Control Act, the Pentagon will have to make annual savings equivalent to just over the entire budget of the German armed forces between 2011 and 2023.**

reduce its military spending by 487 billion U.S. dollars for the period from 2013 to 2023 compared to the original planning; the Pentagon will therefore have to make annual savings equivalent to just over the entire budget of the German armed forces.<sup>18</sup> Whenever the so-called Defense Hawks call for exceptions to these cuts the Democrats usually make such cuts dependent on exceptions of equal proportions in the non-military sphere. And the so-called Deficit Hawks on the Republican side, who are opposed to increasing the debt burden, find ways to scupper the latter.

17 | Jeffrey Goldberg, “A Withering Critique of Obama’s National Security Council”, *The Atlantic*, 12 Nov 2014, <http://theatltn.tc/1CDSFGS> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

18 | The budget of the German Ministry of Defence for 2015 is approximately 33 billion euros. Federal Ministry of Finance, “Entwurf eines Nachtragshaushalts 2015 und die Haushaltseckwerte für die Jahre 2016 bis 2019”, 24 Mar 2015, <http://bundesfinanzministerium.de/Content/DE/Monatsberichte/2015/03/Inhalte/Kapitel-3-Analysen/3-1-nachtragshaushalt-2015-eckwerte-2016-2019.html> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

Consequently, while former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta refused to make plans for a potential sequester, living under this sword of Damocles has become a permanent reality for the armed forces. The cuts are hitting the armed forces particularly hard as they have failed to tackle two fundamental problems for some considerable time: the cost explosion relating to personnel and to military equipment procurement.

In part as a consequence of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which entailed repeated recruitment drives and increases in financial incentives, the expenditure for salaries and healthcare, for instance, is set to increase by 18 per cent by 2018, hollowing out the budget from the inside at the same time.<sup>19</sup> These cost increases are, in fact, not linked to the need to care for wounded veterans but relate to pensions and expenditure for family members insured under the TRICARE program, whose contributions amount to just 18 to 21 per cent of what comparable families in the private sector have to pay. In January, after an investigation lasting one and a half years, a nine-person Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission tasked by the Pentagon submitted 15 recommendations on how the rising personnel-related costs could be curtailed.<sup>20</sup> While the proposals themselves have drawn harsh criticism, many experts have argued that even these measures could not stop a rise in expenditure.

**The USA will be facing another central challenge over the next few decades: the creeping loss of the U.S. military's technical superiority.**

The costs for military hardware projects are also continuing to rise. The ten largest programs – particularly for ships, UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles), helicopters and satellite systems – are pushing up costs and represent the main drivers of this trend. While the problem has been known for years, once again solutions are hard to come by. This is critical insofar as the USA will be facing another central challenge over the next few decades: the creeping loss of the U.S. military's technical superiority. The key elements of American superiority, such as precision-guided munitions and networking capabilities,

19 | Anthony H. Cordesman, "The FY2016 Defense Budget and US Strategy: Key Trends and Data Points", Center for Strategic and International Studies, 6 Mar 2015, <http://csis.org/publication/fy2016-defense-budget-and-us-strategy-key-trends-and-data-points> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

20 | Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission, "Report of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission. Final Report", 29 Jan 2015, <http://www.mcrmc.gov/public/docs/report/MCRMC-FinalReport-29JAN15-HI.pdf> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

are increasingly being adopted even by less ambitious armed forces, putting the vast superiority, which used to be taken for granted, into question. Potential enemies have evaluated the use of these elements and are making preparations for rendering the USA vulnerable through a targeted response. As these armed forces define the USA as their main potential enemy, they have no need to engage in a broad build-up of capabilities and can concentrate on the areas that would make it more difficult for the USA to advance against them by conventional means. This would make it possible for them to engage in precisely targeted, asymmetrical challenges to the USA. China is the prime example; it is focusing on building a submarine fleet of so-called carrier killers, a measure which is obviously directed against the U.S. aircraft carrier strike groups and which will push the operational range of the carrier fleet in the Pacific up to 2,000 sea miles off the coast.<sup>21</sup>



A continuously growing part of U.S. military expenditure is not going towards care of wounded veterans or the purchase of new weapons systems, but is instead towards pensions and co-insured families. | Source: Brian Glass, U.S. Army, flickr ©©©.

21 | Cf. Robert Haddick, "China's most dangerous missile (so far)", *War on the Rocks*, 2 Jul 2014, <http://warontherocks.com/2014/07/chinas-most-dangerous-missile-so-far> (accessed 2 Jul 2015). For a more detailed analysis of the threat to traditional American superiority see Andrew F. Krepinevich, "Why Air-Sea Battle?", Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 19 Feb 2010, <http://csbaonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/2010.02.19-Why-AirSea-Battle.pdf> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

After a decade in which the military development of the USA has concentrated on so-called “small wars”, many experts therefore think that the time has come for a third “Offset” strategy. This goes back to the endeavours made by Eisenhower (First Offset) and Reagan (Second Offset) to maintain America’s technological superiority over the Soviet Union. Under Eisenhower, measures were taken to compensate for conventional military superiority of the Soviet Union by changing to a nuclear counter-strategy (Flexible Response) and Reagan decided to respond to the parity in nuclear capability with the development of precision-guided munitions and advanced communication systems, which gave the USA a lead it still takes advantage of today. The task of developing the Third Offset has been given to the Defense Innovation Initiative announced in November 2014, one of whose main drivers is Deputy Secretary of Defence Robert Work.<sup>22</sup>

## SUMMARY

While Obama may be able to claim some foreign policy achievements of potentially long-term significance during his last year in office – such as an agreement on the Iranian nuclear program and the trade agreement on the Trans-Pacific Partnership – the immediate verdict as to his foreign policy record will be modest at best. Even if many problematic issues of American politics are rooted in events happening before his time in office, the President will not be able to avoid

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the accusation that he has done little to improve matters. Obama, for his part, may not see it that way. Despite the fundamental crises of the last seven years, he did succeed in preventing the USA from becoming massively embroiled in further conflicts. However much one may want to criticise the President for his restraint, there is no convincing argument for saying that greater American engagement would have improved the situation in every case.

22 | Cf. Ben FitzGerald/Shawn Brimley, “Press Note: The New DOD Offset Strategy”, Center for a New American Security, 17 Nov 2014, <http://cnas.org/press-note/new-DOD-offset-strategy> (accessed 2 Jul 2015). For further information on the problem of Anti-Access/Area Denial cf. Bill Dries et al., “Securing Operational Access: Evolving the Air-Sea Battle Concept”, *The National Interest*, 11 Feb 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/securing-operational-access-evolving-the-air-sea-battle-12219> (accessed 2 Jul 2015).

So what legacy will his presidency leave behind? As Richard Sokolsky and Jeremy Shapiro describe in an article for the American Brookings Institution think tank, seven years of Obama administration have left America markedly more sympathetic to George McGovern's exhortation "come home, America" than to John F. Kennedy's willingness to "pay any price, [...] bear any burden, [...] to assure the survival and the success of liberty". While this can in part still be attributed to the experience of the Bush years, the failure of Obama's transformative approaches has strengthened this tendency. Obama's doubts about the extent to which the USA can and should enforce its influence in today's world, notwithstanding its undisputed importance, have become firmly embedded in the minds of many Americans. As James Traub concludes in his analysis of Obama's rhetoric: "In the end, his [Obama's] failure to move the world as he hoped to is our tragedy, far more than it is his."

Obama's foreign policy legacy will therefore force whoever succeeds him to present a coherent vision of U.S. engagement in the world, which will allow the USA to provide

**Future U.S. engagement in the world will have to allow the USA to provide leadership without having to shoulder the entire burden of global order alone.**

leadership without having to shoulder the entire burden of global order alone. This will have to go hand in hand with developing a sustainable concept for putting the security apparatus back on a solid footing and for delivering the necessary long-term planning reliability for the urgently required investments. Notwithstanding the problems in this area, the basis for such a policy has improved markedly. The economy has experienced an 8.1 per cent growth since 2008 – compared to a 2.2 per cent downturn in Europe – and the difference in growth rates between the USA and the fastest growing economies shrunk from 6.5 to 2.6 per cent in the same period. Leveraging this economic upturn to reposition American foreign policy will represent an opportunity as well as a challenge for the next President.

For Germany this means we will no longer be able to rely on the "old" America leading from the front – with all the advantages and disadvantages this entails. Germany will continue to have to provide leadership and shoulder responsibility in Europe. While there is an ongoing debate on the transatlantic relationship being in crisis – the NSA scandal and the TTIP in particular come to mind –, we have been able to see this relationship develop and grow into a true partnership only recently, in the context of the Ukraine crisis. Never before has the United States relied so much

on Germany where dealing with European issues is concerned, and never before has Germany taken this responsibility as seriously as in the last two years. Ultimately, Germany's coming of age where security policy is concerned may therefore be one of the most enduring legacies of Barack Obama's time in office.

This article expresses the author's personal opinion.