

Obama's Foreign Policy: An Appraisal

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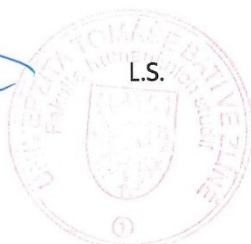
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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce analyzuje, do jaké míry se prezidentovi Baracku Obamovi podařilo prosazovat americké národní zájmy v mezinárodní politice. Stručně popisuje principy americké zahraniční politiky, Obamův původ, a dále se zaměřuje na stěžejní bilaterální vztahy, jež ovlivnily Obamův odkaz ve světové politice. Zaměřuje se na strategie, které byly použity při řešení náročných výzev. Cílem této práce je posoudit Obamových osm let ve funkci a poukázat na vliv jeho stylu “vedení zpovzdálí” na americkou zahraniční politiku.

Klíčová slova: Barack Obama, Spojené státy americké, zahraniční politika, Irák, Afghánistán, Libye, Sýrie, Rusko, Čína, Írán, Brexit.

ABSTRACT

This bachelor's thesis analyzes the extent to which President Barack Obama managed to pursue U.S. core international interests. The paper briefly describes the principles of America's foreign policy, Obama's background, and further focuses on major bilateral relations that influenced Obama's foreign policy legacy. The emphasis is laid on exploring the strategies he used while dealing with challenges. The aim of the thesis is to evaluate Obama's eight years in office and to point out the impact of his “leading from behind” on the U.S. foreign policy.

Keywords: Barack Obama, United States of America, foreign policy, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Russia, China, Iran, Brexit.

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I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	9
1 AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY.....	10
2 BARACK HUSSEIN OBAMA	13
2.1 THE 2008 AND 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS	14
3 AN OVERVIEW OF OBAMA’S DOMESTIC POLICY	17
4 THE PRINCIPLES OF OBAMA’S FOREIGN POLICY	19
4.1 THE OBAMA DOCTRINE: LEADING FROM BEHIND	21
5 MILITARY OPERATIONS	22
5.1 THE IRAQ WAR.....	22
5.2 THE AFGHANISTAN WAR.....	24
6 THE ARAB SPRING	27
6.1 LIBYAN CIVIL WAR	27
6.1.1 The Benghazi Attack	28
6.2 THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR.....	29
6.2.1 Obama’s “Red Line”	31
7 THE RUSSIAN RESET AND RECALIBRATION	33
7.1 THE UKRAINE CRISIS.....	35
8 THE ASIAN “PIVOT” AND U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS.....	37
9 IRAN	40
10 BREXIT	43
CONCLUSION	46
BIBLIOGRAPHY	48

INTRODUCTION

A historic moment, the inauguration of the 44th president of the United States, took place on a winter day in January 2009. In winning the 2008 presidential election, Barack Hussein Obama became the first African American to hold the office. The transition from the previous president George W. Bush, a typical Republican with a politically influential family of southern roots, to a midwestern Democrat from modest means, would be sizeable.¹ At the end of his unpopular mandate, Bush left the United States in the most severe economic crisis since the 1930s Great Depression,² as well as in two ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.³ Obama's talk of hope and change seemed reminiscent of Kennedy, and like Kennedy, Obama faced high expectations.⁴

But whereas Kennedy made it clear from the beginning that he would be a Cold War warrior, Obama was more focused on domestic policies, like the economic recession and health care. Even so, some foreign policy issues, like Iraq and Afghanistan, or the civil wars in Libya and Syria, immediately loomed large. In his second inaugural address, the president declared that "a decade of war is now ending."⁵ But during his tenure, America fought ceaselessly. This thesis argues that on a number of occasions regarding foreign policy, the Obama administration found itself frustrated, reversing course and seeking coalitions. The following chapters focus on key international challenges that Obama faced throughout his eight years in the White House. Furthermore, the thesis suggests that Obama's America was weakened in the international sphere and ineffective in dealing with conflicts.⁶

1. Magdalena Fiřtová, Jan Hornát and Jana Sehnálková, eds, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy: naplněné vize?* (Prague: Karolinum, 2017), 7–11.

2. Jeff Zeleny and Jim Rutenberg, "Divided U.S. Gives Obama More Time," *New York Times*, November 6, 2012, accessed February 3, 2018, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/07/us/politics/obama-romney-presidential-election-2012.html>.

3. Fiřtová, Hornát and Sehnálková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 7.

4. Theodore Sorenson, "Obama the New JFK?" *Guardian*, July 25, 2007, accessed February 3, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/jul/25/obamathenextjfk>.

5. Jonathan Bernstein, "'A Decade of War Is Now Ending'," *Washington Post*, January 21, 2013, accessed April 23, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/plum-line/wp/2013/01/21/a-decade-of-war-is-now-ending/>.

6. Robert Singh, *Barack Obama's Post-American Foreign Policy: The Limits of Engagement* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), 65.

1 AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

“*American exceptionalism* not only celebrates the uniqueness and special virtues of the United States, but also elevates America to a higher moral plane than other countries.”⁷

The theory of American exceptionalism, first used by Alexis de Tocqueville, refers to the idea that the United States has a superior role as it is the greatest and most powerful nation.⁸ This foreign policy is deeply rooted. Back in the seventeenth century, John Winthrop, a Puritan leader and the future governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, stated that “wee shall be as a Citty upon a Hill, the eies of all people are upon us.” Since then, Americans have believed in their God-given responsibility to lead.⁹

American protestant values are the key to understanding the American identity. As journalist John O’Sullivan¹⁰ declared in 1845, these values include individualism, democracy, equality, freedom and respect. America, O’Sullivan stated, is on God’s mission to expand its territory and disseminate democracy.¹¹ What O’Sullivan called “manifest destiny”, Richard Crockatt now refers to as “civilization-consciousness,” the idea that America is unique because of its location and the size and diversity of its population. And with this uniqueness, certain responsibilities come hand in hand. America, writes Crockatt, must act as a leader of the civilized world.¹²

The “city upon a hill” motif has been mentioned by many American presidents, namely by John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan.¹³ Before his presidency, Barack Obama acknowledged this concept in his speeches.¹⁴ During his campaign, he declared that he

7. Bruce W. Jentleson, *American Foreign Policy: The Dynamics of Choice in the 21st Century* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), 92.

8. Ron Fournier, “Republicans Are Wrong about Obama's American Exceptionalism,” *Atlantic*, June 4, 2015, accessed March 9, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/06/republicans-are-wrong-about-obamas-american-exceptionalism/460878/>.

9. Jentleson, *American Foreign Policy*, 92.

10. John Louis O’Sullivan, an American columnist and editor, wrote the essay declaring America’s “manifest destiny” in 1845. In this paper he also advocates the annexation of Texas to the United States.

Source: John O’Sullivan, “Annexation,” *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, 17 (1845): 5-6, 9-10.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Richard Crockatt, *After 9/11: Cultural Dimensions of American Global Power* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 17–18.

13. Will Inboden, “The Sermon on the Mount, and the City Upon a Hill,” *Foreign Policy*, June 17, 2013, accessed March 10, 2018, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/06/17/the-sermon-on-the-mount-and-the-city-upon-a-hill/>.

14. For example in 2006 at the University of Massachusetts, Boston Commencement Address.

believes in *American exceptionalism*, but opposed to Bush, not one based on “our military prowess or our economic dominance.” Interestingly enough, Obama later, as president, claimed: “I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism”, a quote perceived by some as a sign that he does not love his country, as a disdain for American specialness.¹⁵ Others said he was simply not afraid to speak about a nation with many flaws that is despite everything, able to learn from previous mistakes. Criticism of a country does not necessarily express disloyalty, rather patriotism.¹⁶

Nonetheless, since the end of the Cold War, the United States has been the most dominant world power. This fact influences the direction of its foreign relations along with one major event. In 2001, the 9/11 terrorist attacks connected with the Islamic extremist group al-Qaeda, and the subsequent war on terror,¹⁷ brought “American ideological militancy once again to the fore” under the Bush’s neoconservative agenda.¹⁸ Neoconservatism then played an important role in U.S. foreign policy until Obama’s entry into office. Its core is the presumption that problems of other nations are America’s own as it was destined to be the world’s policeman.¹⁹

Taking into account current foreign policies, policy makers can be described by using terms such as *hegemonists* – seek economic, political and military predominance over others; *interventionists* – usage of military force to achieve certain purpose; *isolationists* – a complete cut off from the rest of the world; *proponents of balancing from a distance strategy* – an effort to limit the deployment of the U.S. army with the help of local foreign allies. Obama’s ideological basis does not fit into any of the traditional schools of international affairs.²⁰ According to Christensen, U.S. foreign policy specialist, Obama

See “University of Massachusetts at Boston Commencement Address,” ObamaSpeeches.com, last modified June 2, 2006, accessed March 12, 2018, <http://obamaspeeches.com/074-University-of-Massachusetts-at-Boston-Commencement-Address-Obama-Speech.htm>.

15. Uri Friedman, “‘American Exceptionalism’: A Short History,” *Foreign Policy*, June 18, 2012, accessed March 11, 2018, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/06/18/american-exceptionalism-a-short-history/>.

16. Ron Fournier, “Republicans Are Wrong about Obama's American Exceptionalism,” *Atlantic*, June 4, 2015, accessed March 11, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/07/obamas-new-american-exceptionalism/493415/>.

17. “9/11 Attacks,” History, last modified 2010, accessed March 12, 2018, <https://www.history.com/topics/9-11-attacks>.

18. Crockatt, *After 9/11*, 119.

19. Stephan Eric Bronner, “Is Neoconservatism Dead?” *Guardian*, August 31, 2007, accessed March 12, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/aug/31/isneoconservatismdead>.

20. U.S. foreign policy is traditionally divided into following categories: 1) *Wilsonians* put emphasis on spreading democracy around the world and sustaining international peace through law, 2) *Jeffersonians* focus

developed a “new era of U.S. foreign policy – *progressive pragmatism*.”²¹ Progressive pragmatists directly implement their main interests by using traditional means of foreign policy (military, economy and diplomacy), while concurrently protecting own values.²²

Nowadays, America’s ability to use soft and hard power to achieve its foreign policy goals (protection of territory; maintenance of the access to natural resources; retention of its position in the world; encouragement of human rights, law and democracy; protection of allies) is being questioned because of long-term military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan that have set certain restrictions. As a result of globalization and arms trade, security menaces are lurking from various directions. Also the rapid growth of countries such as China, Russia or India implies a potential threat to their position. These issues complicate America’s influence.²³

on domestic policy and avoid foreign commitments, 3) *Jacksonians* believe in the power of American military as opposed to international agreements and 4) *Hamiltonians* seek the position of world’s superpower by maintaining strong unchallenged economy at home and supporting trade abroad. Belonging to each of these schools does not mutually exclude, politicians often switch from one to the other. See Fiřtová, Hornát and Sehnálková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 148.

21. *Ibid.*, 147–48.

22. *Ibid.*, 148.

23. *Ibid.*, 147.

2 BARACK HUSSEIN OBAMA

“We may come from different places and have different stories, but we share common hopes, and one very American dream.”²⁴

Barack Hussein Obama II was born on August 4, 1961 in Hawaii. Growing up, he had to deal with his bi-racial heritage – his mother was Stanley Ann Dunham, a white American woman, who married a visiting student from Kenya, Barack Hussein Obama, Sr. His parents divorced when Obama Sr. left the family to study at Harvard, thus leaving Obama’s mother raising him only with help of her parents. After the death of Barack’s father, caused by a car accident, Obama Jr. spent his childhood partly in Indonesia with his mother and partly in Hawaii with his grandparents. Barack attended Columbia University, where he received a bachelor’s degree in political science. A year later, he took a job as a community organizer in Chicago. His studies continued at Harvard University’s law school, where Obama managed to become the first African American president of the prestigious *Harvard Law Review*. After a graduation, while working as a lawyer and lecturer at the Chicago University, he met his future wife and mother of his two daughters, Michelle Robinson.²⁵

Obama began his political career in 1996 with a successful candidacy to the Illinois Senate as a Democrat. Re-elected in 1998 and 2002,²⁶ he subsequently handled Senate committee appointments, one of them being chairmanship of the Senate Health & Human Services Committee.²⁷ In July 2004, Obama delivered his significant speech²⁸ at the Democratic National Convention in Boston, calling for unification of America, both politically and personally: “There’s not a liberal America and a conservative America;

24. “Remarks at the Associated Press Annual Luncheon in Washington, DC,” The American Presidency Project, last modified April 14, 2008, accessed February 4, 2018, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=77037>.

25. Fířtová, Hornát and Sehnálková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 8–9. For the reason why he is II and not Jr., See “Who, What Why: Why the II in Barack Obama’s Name,” BBC, accessed April 25, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-13221643>.

26. “Barack Obama,” History, last modified 2009, accessed February 6, 2018, <http://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/barack-obama>.

27. Larry Bell, “Obama Kick-Back Cronyism - Part 2: Illinois Health and Human Disservices,” *Forbes*, November 2, 2011, accessed February 8, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrybell/2011/11/02/obama-kick-back-cronyism-part-2-illinois-health-and-human-disservices/#7b7d31bdecbl>.

28. This specific speech is considered to be a milestone for Obama, elevating his Illinois state policy to a national level. See Fred Greenstein, accessed February 8, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.2202/1540-8884.1292>.

there's the United States of America!"²⁹ He perfectly understood the preceding outline of the importance of rhetoric. According to various observers, Obama's rhetorical abilities make him the most persuasive speaker of our time, comparable to Martin Luther King, Jr., John F. Kennedy or Ronald Reagan.³⁰

Nowadays, one crucial feature of an election campaign is the personality of the candidate as such. Since Obama comes from a racial minority and was not born into wealth or privilege, by means of his speeches he started to be perceived as a living proof that the American Dream is still possible for all citizens.³¹ If he could achieve his dream of becoming a president, the dreams of Americans may possibly come true under his leadership.³²

Consequently, in November 2004, 70 percent of votes in Obama's favor led him to Washington as the third African American to be elected to the U.S. Senate, representing Illinois. As a Senator, he not once partnered with Republicans.³³

2.1 The 2008 and 2012 Presidential Elections

In February 2007, Barack Obama formally announced his candidacy for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination. After a selection process, the Democratic field narrowed to two nominees – Obama, and the former first lady Hillary Clinton. During an arduous primary campaign, Obama gradually became a strong opponent to Clinton and in June 2008 managed to win the Democratic nomination for president.³⁴ Obama, a young freshmen Senator, lacked the political experience required to be president. Thus, Obama's team decided to use a different approach – to portray him as the face of change and hope using slogans such as "Yes, We Can."³⁵ Frustrated American voters welcomed this profound concept due to the ongoing economic crisis along with the unsuccessful final

29. Barack Obama, "Transcript: Illinois Senate Candidate Barack Obama," *Washington Post*, July 17, 2004, accessed February 10, 2018, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A19751-2004Jul27.html>.

30. Shel Leanne, *Rétorika pro lidry – řekněte to jako Obama* (Brno: Computer Press, 2011), 27–33.

31. The "American Dream is the idea that Americans are on a progressive journey to a better society." See Richard W. Leeman, *The Teleological Discourse of Barack Obama* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2012), 8.

32. Fířtová, Hornát and Sehnáľková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 10.

33. History, "Barack Obama."

34. Ibid.

35. Eugenio Lilli, *New Beginning in US-Muslim Relations: President Obama and the Arab Awakening* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 3.

year of Bush's presidency.³⁶ The Republican nomination was clinched by Arizona Senator John McCain.³⁷

Similarly to John F. Kennedy, Obama used a new platform to arouse the so called "Obama phenomenon."³⁸ As JFK used TV, Obama took advantage of the Internet to defeat his opponent, Senator John McCain, during the campaign. By using the interactive advantage of websites (e.g., YouTube), Obama's campaign leaders were able to communicate with supporters, place advertisements, defend the candidate and also connect with voters.³⁹

The 2008 election resulted in victory for the Democratic Party. Obama triumphed over McCain with 365 electoral votes, whereas McCain received only 173 electoral votes. Obama managed to win in some of the U.S. major states, such as Florida, New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, California, etc.⁴⁰

The last year of Obama's first term in the role of the president featured focusing on the re-election campaign, following up his notable 2008 campaign. However, with his approval rating declining from 79⁴¹ to 41 percent and Americans' satisfaction still being at historically lowest levels, Obama's re-election was not assured.⁴² Among the keys to victory, Obama had placed for example his leadership abilities, enhanced by killing the al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, or depicting his Republican challenger Mitt Romney as a "plutocrat businessman out of touch with the concerns of middle-class Americans."⁴³ Thus,

36. According to Gallup polls, President Bush's approval rating to September 2008 was only 27%, ranking him among presidents with some of the lowest ratings along with e.g. Harry Truman in 1952 with 22%. See Jeffrey M. Jones, "Bush's Approval Rating Drops to New Low of 27%," Gallup.com, last modified September 30, 2008, accessed February 22, 2018, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/110806/bushs-approval-rating-drops-new-low-27.aspx>.

37. Ewen MacAskill and Suzanne Goldenberg, "US Elections: Barack Obama Wins Democratic Nomination for President," *Guardian*, June 4, 2008, accessed February 22, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/jun/04/barackobama.hillaryclinton>.

38. Bob Herbert, "The Obama Phenomenon," *New York Times*, January 5, 2008, accessed February 22, 2018, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/05/opinion/05herbert.html>.

39. Claire Cain Miller, "How Obama's Internet Campaign Changed Politics," *New York Times*, November 7, 2008, accessed February 24, 2018, <https://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/11/07/how-obamas-internet-campaign-changed-politics/>.

40. "Election Results 2008," *New York Times*, December 9, 2008, accessed February 24, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2008/results/president/map.html>.

41. "Poll: 79% Approve of Way Obama Is Handling Transition," CNN.com, last modified December 9, 2008, accessed February 25, 2018, <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/12/09/Obama.poll/>.

42. "Obama Job Approval Average Slides to New Low in 11th Quarter," Gallup.com, last modified October 21, 2011, accessed February 25, 2018, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/150230/obama-job-approval-average-slides-new-low-11th-quarter.aspx>.

43. David Jackson, "How Obama Won Re-election," *USA Today*, November 7, 2012, accessed February 25, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2012/11/07/turnout-and-organization-were-key-to-obama-victory/1688537/>.

with 332 electoral votes, Obama commenced his second term in the office and extended his place in history.⁴⁴

44. "President Map – Election 2012," *New York Times*, November 29, 2012, accessed February 26, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2012/results/president.html>.

3 AN OVERVIEW OF OBAMA'S DOMESTIC POLICY

Taking the Oval Office in the middle of an economic meltdown caused Obama to make domestic events his priority.⁴⁵ To Obama's advantage, the outcome of the 2008 Congressional elections was that the Democratic Party dominated both Houses of Congress⁴⁶, leaving the Republicans somewhat powerless.⁴⁷ Obama was aware that these suitable conditions will not necessarily last after the 2010 elections, hence he immediately started to pursue his interests.

As American leading financial institutions were about to collapse, and the economy stopped growing, and with an unemployment rate reaching 10%, Obama's first crucial recommendation to Congress was legislation aimed at stimulating the economy – the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*. This \$800-billion stimulus was signed to boost the economic growth, extend unemployment benefits, provide funds to automobile industry, focus federal spending on education, etc.⁴⁸ Even though these steps helped avoid an economic disaster, they simultaneously increased the federal debt and federal budget deficit.⁴⁹

As soon as President Obama was inaugurated, he began working on passing his health care policy proposals. His first two years of presidency with the Democratic Congress enabled Obama to pass the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* (PPACA, also known as Obamacare) in 2010. Health care reform has been a major point of discussion in America for years⁵⁰ and PPACA pledges for instance health insurance coverage even for lower-income U.S. citizens or extending coverage for millions of Americans.⁵¹ In 2016, during his presidential campaign, the future Republican president Donald J. Trump

45. David Von Drehle, "Honor and Effort: What President Obama Achieved in Eight Years," *Time*, December 22, 2016, accessed February 28, 2018, <http://time.com/4616866/barack-obama-administration-look-back-history-achievements/>.

46. The 111th House of Representatives consisted of 257 Democrats and 178 Republicans; the 111th Senate was comprised of 57 Democrats, 41 Republicans. See "House of Representatives Map," *New York Times*, December 9, 2008, accessed February 28, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2012/results/president.html>. <https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2008/results/house/map.html>.

47. Anthony Neal, *The Oral Presidency of Barack Obama* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2018), 146.

48. Michael Nelson, "Barack Obama: Domestic Affairs," *Miller Center of Public Affairs*, accessed February 28, 2018, <https://millercenter.org/president/obama/domestic-affairs>.

49. "The Presidency of Barack Obama," *Khan Academy*, accessed February 28, 2018, <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-us-history/period-9/apush-us-after-2000/a/barack-obama-as-president>.

50. Fiřtová, Hornát and Sehnálková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 23.

51. Khan Academy, "The Presidency of Barack Obama."

repeatedly promised to “repeal and replace” Obamacare.⁵² Although Republicans have opposed this idea since the very beginning, none of them so far managed to succeed. PPACA still belongs among Obama’s biggest achievements.⁵³

Unfortunately for Obama, in the 2010 Congressional election the Democrats suffered a massive defeat. As a result, the Republicans took back the House and were now able to sabotage the president’s politics, including those regarding gun rights.⁵⁴ During his 8 years in office, the United States experienced a record number of mass shootings. While he never failed to demonstrate compassion with the situation, Obama repeatedly addressed his frustration with Republicans not passing stronger gun control bills. These addresses paradoxically only increased gun sales.⁵⁵

It was agreed by Obama’s advisers that his priority had to be the deepening recession at home. However, the reports coming in to Obama “in the President’s Daily Brief made it clear that America’s rivals around the world were not waiting for his economic initiatives.”⁵⁶ Barack Obama ultimately managed to overcome an unparalleled economic crisis and to provide affordable health care for millions of Americans. He will probably be remembered as a president, whose main focus was domestic policy.⁵⁷

52. Nick Berry, “Obama’s Domestic Policy Legacy,” *Capital Gazette*, December 22, 2016, accessed March 3, 2018, <http://www.capitalgazette.com/opinion/columns/ph-ac-ce-column-berry-1222-20161222-story.html>.

53. Daniel Khalili-Tari, “US States Sue Trump Administration in Effort to End Obamacare through Courts,” *Independent*, February 27, 2018, accessed March 3, 2018, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/obamacare-trump-lawsuit-healthcare-affordable-care-act-tax-reform-us-supreme-court-latest-a8230261.html>.

54. Paul Harris and Ewen MacAskill, “US Midterm Election Results Herald New Political Era as Republicans Take House,” *Guardian*, November 3, 2010, accessed March 4, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/nov/03/us-midterm-election-results-tea-party>.

55. Ben Garrett, “President Barack Obama and Gun Rights,” Thought.com, last modified October 7, 2017, accessed March 4, 2018, <https://www.thoughtco.com/president-barack-obama-and-gun-rights-721329>.

56. David E. Sanger, introduction to *The Inheritance: The World Obama Confronts and the Challenges to American Power* (New York: Crown, 2009), xxix.

57. Christian Nünlist, “The Legacy of Obama’s Foreign Policy,” *CSS ETH Zurich*, no. 188 (March 2016): 1, <https://www.research-collection.ethz.ch/bitstream/handle/20.500.11850/118205/1/eth-49410-01.pdf>.

4 THE PRINCIPLES OF OBAMA'S FOREIGN POLICY

With the arrival of Barack Obama in the Office of the President, there came a change in foreign policy. Jentleson, a leading scholar of American foreign policy, asserts that there are two significant personal factors that affect the ability of a president to fulfill the role of a foreign policy leader: *prior experience* and *political-psychological belief*.⁵⁸

International relations was one of the main subjects Obama promised to ameliorate during his presidential campaign. An average voter is usually not concerned with FP as much as with the domestic one. However, Bush's long-term (2001-2009) interventionist approach made the U.S. foreign policy a matter of importance.⁵⁹ Obama repeatedly publically voiced his disapproval of Bush's unilateral actions, which resulted in a wave of anti-americanism.⁶⁰ He promised to end the "dumb" war in Iraq, withdraw the U.S. troops from Iraq by the end of 2011 and concentrate on the "necessary war" in Afghanistan. Furthermore, he indicated a possible discourse with the longstanding U.S. enemies – Cuba and Iran.⁶¹ He additionally promised to close the Guantanamo Bay detention camp.⁶² Hence, he managed to defeat Hillary Clinton and John McCain.⁶³

Obama's belief-systems framework includes managing a strategy that would maintain the U.S. leadership role in the world. Although he recognized the central role of the United States, he did so within a more multilateral context. He claimed that America cannot face the threats of the twenty-first century alone and *au contraire*, the world cannot meet the threats without them. He adds that neither oppression nor derogation of the world is the right path, America has to represent an example:⁶⁴ "Our power alone cannot protect us, nor does it entitle us to do as we please ... our power grows through its prudent use; our security emanates from the justness of our cause."⁶⁵

58. Jentleson, *American Foreign Policy*, 324.

59. Fiřtová, Hornát and Sehnáľková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 150.

60. "Remarks to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City," American Presidency Project, last modified September 23, 2009, accessed March 10, 2018, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=86659&st=&st1=>.

61. Nünlist, "The Legacy of Obama's Foreign Policy," 2.

62. Spencer Ackerman, "Guantánamo Bay: Obama Reiterates Call to Close Prison in Final Plan to Congress," *Guardian*, February 23, 2016, accessed March 8, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/feb/23/obama-guantanamo-bay-closure-plan-congress>.

63. The Republican presidential candidates generally supported Bush's policy of interventions; Hillary Clinton, as a Democratic senator, agreed with the wars as well. See Fiřtová, Hornát and Sehnáľková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 150.

64. Jentleson, *American Foreign Policy*, 324.

65. Jon Swaine, "Barack Obama's Inauguration: Reaction from the World's Media," *Telegraph*, January 2009, accessed March 19, 2018,

Overall, Obama sought the improvement of international relationships and restoring the global trust in America, which had been harmed during the Bush era.⁶⁶ Many European allies were alarmed by Bush's style of presidency. He was not willing to listen to them, nor did he show interest in the UN. To their dislike, his instinctive response was to use a military approach in dealing with world's trouble spots. As a result, during the 2008 presidential election, anyone was a better option than Bush. Thus, after only eight months in the office, the Norwegian Nobel Committee unexpectedly awarded Obama with the Peace Prize⁶⁷ "for his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and co-operation between peoples." By this move, the Nobel Committee was evidently encouraging the new president to continue in creating a new climate in international politics. However, many continental commentators argue that the award can hardly be a recognition of anything he had accomplished in such a short period of time and he deserves at best a badge for effort. Others claim that he was awarded simply for not being George W. Bush.⁶⁸

Obama's 2009 Nobel Peace Prize speech is generally considered his most important statement regarding the use of force. He claimed that war is often necessary, but always tragic, and that "the instruments of war are indispensable to the preservation of peace". But concurrently he often mentioned that he did not want "killing people" to be his legacy.⁶⁹ While giving his acceptance speech, Obama did not forget to mention the people he admired, of which the most significant for him was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. King's philosophy was to never recognize violence, he envisioned a more expansive democracy and was not afraid to exclaim the flaws of his beloved country in order to transform it. This conception has influenced Obama in many respects as these parallels with Obama's

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/barackobama/4303525/Barack-Obamas-inauguration-Reaction-from-the-worlds-media.html>.

66. Nünlist, "The Legacy of Obama's Foreign Policy," 1.

67. Obama became just the third sitting U.S. president to have the honor (next to Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson). See Rupert Cornwell, "US States Sue Trump Administration in Effort to End Obamacare through Courts," *Independent*, January 16, 2017, accessed March 20, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/barack-obama-2009-nobel-peace-prize-speech-in-full-us-president-oslo-norway-a7521976.html>.

68. "Analysis: Did Obama Win Nobel for Not Being Bush?" CNN.com, last modified December 9, 2008, accessed March 21, 2018, <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/12/09/Obama.poll/>.

69. Eliot A. Cohen, "Obama's Weak Words of War," *Washington Post*, June 3, 2016, accessed March 21, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/obama-legacy/wartime-politics.html>.

philosophy define his diplomatic intentions.⁷⁰ King's influence was also reflected in the Oval Office – a framed program from the 1963 March on Washington, where the famous “I have a dream” speech was delivered, in addition to King's bust, decorated the office.⁷¹

4.1 The Obama Doctrine: Leading From Behind

One of Obama's advisers described his actions regarding foreign policy by an oxymoron “leading from behind”. In fact, this style is not a doctrine, but it is an accurate description of his foreign policy of “acting at the very last moment, hesitation, delay and indecision.” This term was used for the first time in 2011, in connection with the mission to overthrow the Libyan dictator Qaddafi.⁷² Obama did not conclusively forgo using power, but refused to use it unilaterally at the cost of the lives of American soldiers. “Obama avoids those problems he thinks he cannot solve”, which explains his relationship towards Russia. In some cases, such as Libya, this approach can be successful, in some it may not be.⁷³ For example when he threatened Syria's government over the usage of chemical weapons, and then he changed his mind. According to Pipes, after the second inauguration, the Obama Doctrine was simple and universal: “warm relations with adversaries and cool them with friends.” The purpose of it should be to correct previous mistakes, limit the use of force and inspire opponents to cooperate. As a result, America's long-term partners felt inferior.⁷⁴

70. “Martin Luther King Jr. And President Obama: A Look at Their Legacies,” Wbur, accessed February 28, 2018, last modified January 16, 2018, <http://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2017/01/16/mlk-obama-legacies>.

71. “Obama Has Made the Oval Office His Own,” CBS News, last modified January 5, 2010, accessed March 21, 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/obama-has-made-the-oval-office-his-own/>.

72. Charles Krauthammer, “The Obama Doctrine: Leading from Behind,” *Washington Post*, April 28, 2011, accessed March 22, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-obama-doctrine-leading-from-behind/2011/04/28/AFBCy18E_story.html?utm_term=.758d58f7153e.

73. Fiřtová, Hornát and Sehnálková, *Prezidentsví Baracka Obamy*, 174.

74. Daniel Pipes, “Decoding the Obama Doctrine,” *Washington Times*, April 6, 2015, accessed March 23, 2018, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/apr/6/daniel-pipes-decoding-obama-doctrine/>.

5 MILITARY OPERATIONS

The Constitution of the United States separates *war powers* equally between the president and Congress. While Congress has the power to declare war, the President of the United States of America shall be a Commander-in-Chief of the U. S. army and navy. More specifically, to be in charge of any military operations. As previously noted, when Barack Obama entered the Office, America was involved in two ongoing wars – in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁷⁵

5.1 The Iraq War

Despite the U.S. victory in the *Persian Gulf War* (1990-91), the United States and the UN continuously faced challenges from Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Even though the cease-fire agreement with the UN involved prohibition of manufacturing or possessing chemical, biological or nuclear weapons,⁷⁶ in the 1990s the UN inspections discovered prohibited weapons on the Iraq territory. They repeatedly flouted the restrictions, which led to 1998 bombing of Iraq (code-named *Operation Desert Fox*) under the leadership of former president Bill Clinton.⁷⁷

In the wake of the September 11 attacks of 2001, the U.S. government along with President Bush asserted that the vulnerability of the United States combined with Hussein, providing terrorist groups with weapons of mass destruction, could have fatal consequences. In March, 2003, the U.S. army invaded Iraq with the approval of 64 percent of Americans⁷⁸ and without the vote of the UN Security Council, defending this move as self-defense as well as defense of the world.⁷⁹ However, the official reasons for the invasion were promptly disputed due to the fact that Hussein was standing in the way of Western oil companies operating in Iraq.⁸⁰ Though the first phase of the invasion was

75 Jentleson, *American Foreign Policy*, 31.

76. *Ibid.*, 419.

77. "Iraq Weapons Inspections Fast Facts," CNN.com, last modified March 2, 2018, accessed March 23, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/10/30/world/meast/iraq-weapons-inspections-fast-facts/index.html>.

78. Dalia Sussman, "Poll Shows View of Iraq War Is Most Negative since Start," *New York Times*, May 25, 2007, accessed March 25, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/25/washington/25view.html>.

79. The Iraq War coalition consisted of forty countries, with the main partner being Great Britain (led by Prime Minister Tony Blair), then Italy (Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi) and Australia (Prime Minister John Howard); Although it was not an unilateral war, America's customary allies such as France and Germany went into opposition. See Jentleson, *American Foreign Policy*, 419.

80. Antonia Juhasz, "Iraq Weapons Inspections Fast Facts," CNN.com, last modified April 15, 2013, accessed March 27, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/03/19/opinion/iraq-war-oil-juhasz/index.html>.

quick and Saddam Hussein's⁸¹ regime was overthrown, the main issue appeared to be maintaining security in the occupied country. And so, America got involved in an expensive and exhausting war, which resulted in thousands of deaths.⁸²

Obama opposed the war in Iraq before it had even begun, since 2002. He publicly stated during his Chicago speech that he was against a “rash war based on passion and principle.” He also mentioned that he was aware of Saddam's nature, but did not consider him an imminent threat to the United States.⁸³ He continued with the criticism as a presidential candidate. Obama labeled the war a “dangerous distraction” and called for shifting the focus on the battle in Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁸⁴ He introduced his strategy in 2008 to *The New York Times*. As the U.S. armed forces suffered from exhaustion and the military spending had significantly exceeded the original plan, there was only one solution – a careful withdrawal of the troops.⁸⁵

Soon after his inauguration, Obama began consistently working on ending the war. The campaign promise of 16-month withdrawal had to be prolonged to the end of 2011.⁸⁶ Still, there were some U.S. conservatives arguing that the end of the Iraq mission would leave Iraq vulnerable and instable. In December 2011, president Obama met with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, formally declaring an end to the war. They further discussed building a “comprehensive partnership” between these two sovereign nations.⁸⁷ When the last troops left Iraq, a sectarian cleansing started to tear the country apart. Republicans blamed Obama for “not pressing harder to keep an American force in the

81. Saddam Hussein was arrested by U.S. soldiers, found guilty of crimes against humanity (including mass killings) and executed in 2006. See “War in Iraq Begins,” History, last modified 2003, accessed March 27, 2018, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/war-in-iraq-begins>.

82. Ibid.

By 2007, the approval numbers for the Iraq war almost reversed with 35% agreeing with the war and 61% of respondents stating that the United States should have stayed out. See Sussman, “Poll Shows View of Iraq War Is Most Negative Since Start.”

83. “Barack Obama's 2002 Speech against the Iraq War,” ObamaSpeeches.com, last modified October 2002, accessed March 28, 2018, <http://obamaspeeches.com/001-2002-Speech-Against-the-Iraq-War-Obama-Speech.htm>.

84. “Obama Calls Iraq War a ‘Dangerous Distraction’,” CNN.com, last modified July 15, 2008, accessed March 28, 2018, <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/07/15/obama.iraq/index.html>.

85. Barack Obama, “My Plan for Iraq,” *New York Times*, July 14, 2008, accessed March 29, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/14/opinion/14obama.html?_r=3.

86. “Barack Obama and What He Said on the Iraq War,” *Telegraph*, December 14, 2011, accessed March 28, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/barackobama/8956959/Barack-Obama-and-what-he-said-on-the-iraq-war.html>.

87. Tom Cohen, “Obama Says U.S. Goal Is Successful Iraq,” CNN.com, last modified December 13, 2011, accessed March 30, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2011/12/12/politics/obama-maliki/index.html>.

country.”⁸⁸ In 2014, the U.S. troops had to return back to Iraq to help combat the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), without officially carrying out a combat mission.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, bringing an end to the Iraq war belongs to Obama’s most remarkable achievements.⁹⁰

5.2 The Afghanistan War

The United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001 as an immediate response to the September 11 terrorist attacks. The main purpose of the *Operation Enduring Freedom* was to topple the Taliban, who had sheltered the al Qaeda network, perpetrators of the attacks.⁹¹ The Bush administration accused the Taliban of harboring the founder of the Islamist organization and mastermind of numerous terrorist attacks, Osama Bin Laden. The same year, Taliban government was removed and al-Qaeda was displaced quickly from the Afghan state. Yet the war persisted as they were unable to overthrow the strengthening Taliban radicals.⁹² In 2002, President Bush announced a new strategy after reaching the nominal goals and pledged to rebuild Afghanistan’s core institutions. In 2004, Hamid Karzai became the first directly elected president of Afghanistan, which evoked positive presumptions.⁹³ But since 2006, Bush was criticized for failing to send enough troops and resources needed for securing stability in Afghanistan. Due to a lack of focus on Afghanistan and its corruption and incompetence, there was only an insignificant progress reflected during the first seven years of war.

During his major speech on wars in 2008, Obama called the war in Afghanistan “deteriorating and unacceptable”, demanded for relocation of troops from Iraq and gave a promise to spend an additional \$1 billion in civilian assistance every year. He also stated:

88. Greg Jaffe, “‘Tell Me How This Ends’: Obama’s Struggle with the Hard Questions of War,” *Washington Post*, June 3, 2016, accessed March 30, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/obama-legacy/ending-war-in-iraq.html>.

89. Kevin Liptak, “Trump: US Troops ‘Fighting like Never Before’ in Iraq,” CNN.com, last modified March 29, 2017, 1 accessed March 30, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/03/28/politics/trump-iraq-troops-comments/index.html>.

90. CNN.com, “Obama Says U.S. Goal Is Successful Iraq.”

91. The hardline Taliban movement enforces strict interpretation of Islamic law – Sharia in areas straddling Afghanistan and Pakistan. They were in power from 1994 until 2001, though recognized only by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan. See “Who Are the Taliban,” BBC News, last modified May 26, 2016, accessed March 31, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-11451718>.

92. Ben Westcott, “Afghanistan: 16 Years, Thousands Dead and No Clear End in Sight,” CNN.com, last modified November 1, 2017, accessed March 31, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/08/21/asia/afghanistan-war-explainer/index.html>.

93. “Afghanistan: War and Reconstruction,” CNN.com, last modified April 3, 2009, accessed March 31, 2018, <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/04/03/afghanistan.war.timeline/index.html>.

“As President, I will make the fight against al-Qaeda and the Taliban the top priority that it should be. This is a war that we have to win.”⁹⁴ Upon the inauguration, in his first big foreign-policy pronouncement, Obama defined his goal intelligibly: “Disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda” (which soon replaced Bush’s indistinct adage “global war on terror”). Obama was determined not to employ the Bush’s “light-footprint” strategy, therefore he right away deployed 17,000 additional troops to Afghanistan.⁹⁵ To help the Afghan government develop an economy not based on illegal drugs, between 2009 and 2010 a substantial increase in civilian assistance was ordered, along with more troops (nearly doubled) and additional U.S. diplomats.

Administration’s view of the war was dramatically influenced by the replacement of generals. Obama dismissed the general overseeing the war in favor of a “fresh thinking” Gen. Stanley McChrystal, who argued that comprehensive counterinsurgency predicated on state-building is the right way to deal with the war.⁹⁶ However, to displeasure of the public and the president, considerably time-consuming. The strategy required establishment of a legitimate Afghan state. The problem arose while trying to come up with a regional example of the proposed state. And even if found, there was no certainty of its feasibility or that it would be beneficial for the U.S. security. Moreover, Obama’s rocky relationship with Karzai and the rampant corruption in the Afghan government made him realize that building a democratic state was beyond America’s competence.⁹⁷ After two years, Obama started to doubt whether the war was as necessary as he first believed. At first, a strategy of huge investment in Afghanistan was pronounced, which consequently disappeared from his speeches due to a stagnant economy at home.⁹⁸

Setting deadlines on the withdrawal of troops is considered to be one of the major strategic mistakes Obama made. In 2011, the president announced 2014 to be the year of transition without consulting his military advisers. Since then, Afghans would be self-reliant and the focus of attention would move to the U.S. nation-building itself.⁹⁹ Obama

94. Paul D. Miller, “Obama’s Failed Legacy in Afghanistan,” *American Interest*, February 15, 2016, accessed March 31, 2018, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2016/02/15/obamas-failed-legacy-in-afghanistan/>.

95. David E. Sanger, “Afghan Good Enough,” in *Confront and Conceal: Obama’s Secret Wars and Surprising Use of American Power* (New York: Crown, 2012).

96. Ibid.

97. Alicia P.Q. Wittmeyer, “What Went Wrong in Afghanistan?” *Foreign Policy*, March 4, 2013, accessed March 31, 2018, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/03/04/what-went-wrong-in-afghanistan/>.

98. Sanger, “Afghan Good Enough.”

99. Nünlist, “The Legacy of Obama’s Foreign Policy,” 3.

also defended this move by saying that it would help the Afghan government to take over responsibility and appease the Democratic Party as well as the public. In fact, this war was not as unpopular as the Iraq war. Americans did not demand the deadline until Obama declared one.¹⁰⁰

In May, 2011, the U.S. forces achieved a breakthrough and killed al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. In 2012, a Strategic Partnership Agreement with Afghanistan was signed, which set the terms for relations after 2014 (the scheduled year of the withdrawal) and promised an “enduring partnership” between the two nations. Once the signs of success appeared, Obama accelerated the fixed timeline and the departure of the troops was underway. In spite of the repeatedly voiced concerns of the Defense Department that, though improving, the Afghan security forces were not ready for such independence. Additionally, the billions of dollars and tens of thousands of U.S. troops devoted to this cause would be in vain. In December 2014, the U.S.-led coalition formally ended its combat mission in Afghanistan, America then followed with two narrow missions: training and advising Afghan forces and supporting counter-terrorist operations against al-Qaeda or ISIS.

Only a month after the announcement, the Islamic State began rising, thus reminding of the common threat of the failed states becoming safe havens for terrorists. Obama’s initial plan to withdraw all troops by the end of his second term needed to be abandoned. Due to a pressure exerted on him,¹⁰¹ the president left behind more troops than intended, meaning handing off Afghanistan to his successor as an unfinished business.¹⁰²

The urgent challenge for him was the 2008 financial crisis. However, from the beginning, Afghanistan was “the slow-burning disaster”. Obama feared this war could consume his presidency, as the Vietnam War did Lyndon Johnson’s and Iraq Bush’s. See Sanger, “Afghan Good Enough.”

100. Miller, “Obama’s Failed Legacy in Afghanistan.”

101. Ibid.

102. Stephen Collinson and Tal Kopan, “Obama to Leave More Troops than Planned in Afghanistan,” CNN.com, last modified July 73, 2016, accessed April 2, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/07/06/politics/obama-to-speak-on-afghanistan-wednesday-morning/index.html>.

6 THE ARAB SPRING

On 4 June 2009, Obama gave a speech in front of a mostly Muslim audience in Egypt, promising to set a new beginning in the relationship with the Muslim world. In oppose to the prior U.S. policy that spawned fear and mistrust, the U.S. president pledged to mend the misperceptions between the United States and the Muslim world.¹⁰³ However, Obama was about to deal with more problems than those passed on to him as new crisis and threats emerged on the international political scene. In December 2010, a series of pro-democracy uprisings, referred to as the “Arab Spring”, occurred throughout the Middle East and northern Africa aimed at achieving regime changes. This territory has long been a main focus, therefore America was expected to be actively involved in the events, presumably contributing by an effective strategy.¹⁰⁴ Two uprisings in particular put the so called Obama Doctrine to the test, Libya and Syria.¹⁰⁵

6.1 Libyan Civil War

Inspired by revolutions in adjacent countries, the opponents to the regime of an authoritarian dictator Colonel Muammar Qaddafi, revolted in February 2011. Thousands spontaneously demonstrated on the streets of Libyan cities as a response to dissatisfaction with Qaddafi’s forty-two years rule fraught with oppression and corruption. Unlike the movements e.g. in Egypt or Bahrain, the peaceful uprisings in Libya turned swiftly violent. The anti-government protesters were in large numbers injured or killed in the rioting. The Obama administration initially criticized the “use of violence” and urged the Libyan government to respect the right of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. As the violence increased, Obama expressed that the top priority was to ensure safety of the U.S. citizens in Libya. When the Americans departed the country safely, the U.S. officials condemned the Libyan regime more directly. In this manner, The White House together with European allies decided to coordinate sanctions on Libya. Obama did not dither over sanctioning the regime and urging Qaddafi to resign, claiming the leader “lost legitimacy.” In March 2011, NATO took control of the military intervention and authorized a no-fly zone over Libya and air strikes, initially aimed at protecting civilians. But the objective expanded and seven months later, whilst the civil war was in full swing, Col. Qaddafi was

103. Lilli, *New Beginning in US-Muslim Relations*, 3–4.

104. Fířtová, Hornát and Sehnálková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 193.

105. Sanger, “What Works Once Doesn’t Always Work Twice.”

captured and executed by rebel fighters. The White House described ending of the Qaddafi's autocratic rule and the decision to intervene as a foreign policy success.¹⁰⁶

Obama intended to avoid the kind of nation building as in Iraq, primarily sending in U.S. troops. Driven by the vision of a low-risk and cheap intervention, he withdrew after Qaddafi was killed. America and its allies were unwilling to plan for a post-Qaddafi Libya, which caused the country to collapse and become a magnet for terrorist groups such as Ansar al Sharia or ISIS.¹⁰⁷ The U.S. interests were undermined as well – the cooperation with Russia was limited, Syria's civil war fueled and nuclear non-proliferation weakened. Opponents of the Libya intervention argue that not interfering would have been a more effective policy. Qaddafi's potential successor, his son Saif al-Islam, was relatively liberal and Western-educated, thus potentially a better chance for the failed state.¹⁰⁸ In Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, Washington overthrew the regimes and failed to plan for the aftermath, suggesting a pattern in the American war strategy.¹⁰⁹ By May 2014, a new civil war erupted in Libya between liberals and Islamists. Obama was elected on a "no more Iraqs" platform, but he repeated the same mistake of "winning the war and losing the peace". In an interview later that year, Obama acknowledged regrets about Libya and admitted the mistake was "failing to plan for the day after, what I think was the right thing to do, in intervening in Libya."¹¹⁰ In such states, where government is suppressing rebellion, the chances are that military intervention on humanitarian grounds only leads to destabilization of the country and creates suitable conditions for the extremists, respectively a civil war. Thus, the low post-intervention effort was not the mistake, it was intervening in the first place.¹¹¹

6.1.1 The Benghazi Attack

On September 11, 2012, U.S. ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other American personnel were killed when Islamist militants stormed a consulate in Libya's second

106. Lilli, *New Beginning in US-Muslim Relations*, 166–74.

107. Christi Parsons and W.J. Hennigan, "President Obama, Who Hoped to Sow Peace, Instead Led the Nation in War," *Los Angeles Times*, January 13, 2017, accessed April 2, 2018, <http://www.latimes.com/projects/la-na-pol-obama-at-war/>.

108. Alan J. Kuperman, "Obama's Libya Debacle," *Foreign Affairs*, April 2015, accessed April 2, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/libya/obamas-libya-debacle>.

109. Dominic Tierney, "The Legacy of Obama's 'Worst Mistake'," *Atlantic*, April 15, 2016, accessed April 3, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/04/obamas-worst-mistake-libya/478461/>.

110. Ibid.

111. Kuperman, "Obama's Libya Debacle."

largest city, Benghazi. Months in advance, the State Department, then led by Hillary Clinton, repeatedly denied requests for additional security of the diplomatic compound, required due to an impending rise of Islamic extremism in the area. Clinton instead decided to rely on Libyan's security, which proved to be inadequate. Instead of reinforcing the security with the approaching anniversary of 9/11, conversely a security detail was removed.¹¹² The Obama administration responded to the assault mistakenly by claiming it was "not a coordinated terrorist attack, but a spontaneous act of violence born of a protest over an anti-Islamic video."¹¹³ Reportedly, both president and Clinton knew all along the incident was organized by terrorists because of e-mails received in real time.¹¹⁴ Yet the Washington's response to the crisis was slow, Obama did not want a show of force, potentially "offending Muslim sensibilities."¹¹⁵ To draw criticism away from Obama before the elections, Clinton took full responsibility for the prior security decisions.¹¹⁶ It was not until 2016, when a Congress report finally faulted the military for its slow response, thus finding no evidence of Clinton's culpability. Two Republicans simultaneously issued a supplementary report describing a "tragic failure of leadership" of the Obama administration with regard to the Benghazi attack.¹¹⁷

6.2 The Syrian Civil War

Similarly to Libya, the civil war in Syria began in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. The early stage of the uprising in March 2011 was evoked by local grievances, which escalated into demonstrations focused on wider national issues (such as government's corruption,

112. Peter Ferrara, "Benghazi: Obama's Actions Amount to a Shameful Dereliction of Duty," *Forbes*, October 25, 2012, accessed April 3, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/peterferrara/2012/10/25/benghazi-obamas-actions-amount-to-a-shameful-dereliction-of-duty/#53911138359c>.

113. David Lawler, "Benghazi Scandal: What Happened and What Does It Mean for Hillary Clinton?" *Telegraph*, March 22, 2016, accessed April 3, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/03/22/benghazi-scandal-what-happened-and-what-does-it-mean-for-hillary/>.

114. The purpose allegedly was to mislead Americans only eight weeks before Barack Obama stood for the re-election. He and Clinton were then accused of taking part in a politically motivated cover-up. See *Ibid.*

115. Ferrara, "Benghazi."

116. Raf Sanchez, "Hillary Clinton: I Take Responsibility for Benghazi Attack," *Telegraph*, October 16, 2012, accessed April 4, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/libya/9610965/Hillary-Clinton-I-take-responsibility-for-Benghazi-attack.html>.

117. Lauren Gambino and David Smith, "House Benghazi Report Faults Military Response, Not Clinton, for Deaths," *Guardian*, January 28, 2016, accessed April 4, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jun/28/house-benghazi-report-clinton-attack-military>.

democratization, better living conditions). The Syrian government, led by president Bashar al-Assad, responded to the protests by brutally killing and illegally imprisoning hundreds of demonstrators. The brutality, aimed to stop the uprising, had the opposite effect and fueled public rage. The unorganized groups of protesters tried to form a more structured opposition. For example in July 2011, defectors from the military announced foundation of a rebel group, the Free Syrian Army (FSA), with a purpose to overthrow Assad's regime. However, the Syrian armed forces were loyal to the Assad regime as they were, same to Assad, members of the Alawite minority.¹¹⁸

Obama provided words of condemnation with the continuous unrest and rhetorically supported the uprising. Nevertheless, it took him four months to announce that president Assad had lost legitimacy. The reason was a perception that the Syrian president had been a potential reformer. The U.S. officials believed the young Western-educated Assad needed time to implement the reforms demanded by demonstrators. Only when the situation in Syria showed that Assad was not able to stabilize the disorder did the Obama administration decide the U.S. interests would be best served by Assad's resignation. He publically declared joining the Syrian opposition in August 2011, while consistently relying on diplomacy as an intermediary to achieve regime change.¹¹⁹

The incident, which became as a civil war, gradually gained an international dimension due to the connection of an originally politically-economically-driven conflict with a religious aspect. The long-term Syrian alliance with Iran or Lebanon's Hezbollah movement suggested possible involvement of other participants. In September 2015, Russia began an operation against the "Islamic extremists", while supplying Assad's regime with military equipment since the beginning.¹²⁰ The rise of other forces added a further dimension to the conflict. ISIS besieged large areas of Syria and Iraq in 2014. Since then, the U.S.-led forces bombed ISIS targets across the region. In 2016, Russian and Syrian government forces took control of the strategic rebel-held city of Aleppo. Thenceforth, the FSA only controlled limited areas in northwestern Syria.¹²¹

Obama showed a hesitant policy and reluctant approach toward the Syrian uprising. There were several reasons for his "halfway effort." Firstly, there was the cautionary

118. Lilli, *New Beginning in US-Muslim Relations*, 188–89.

119. *Ibid.*, 192.

120. Fířtová, Hornát and Sehnáľková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 195–96.

121. "Syria," *History*, last modified 2017, accessed April 5, 2018, <https://www.history.com/topics/the-history-of-syria>.

example of Libya, where the overthrow of the regime and the subsequent civil war caused a threat of disintegrating the state into several independent territorial units. Secondly, the engagement of Russia and China made the approval of an intervention at the UN Security Council highly improbable as Russia vetoed everything anti-Syrian. Obama also wanted to avoid confronting Russia and disrupt the already fragile relations.¹²² The U.S.-Syrian relations were also tense for decades and resulted in an absence of political or military ties, thereby America had no tools to pressure the Syrian government. And most importantly, the economic crisis in America did not allow for yet another military intervention. All that considered, the task of framing a policy response to the Syrian uprising was much more complex than it seemed.¹²³

Obama argued that the regime supporters (Russia and Iran) had greater interests in Syria and would fight hard to defend them. In his opinion, after an American intervention, the conflict would only grow in severity.¹²⁴ Overall, no political change was implemented by the Obama administration. Their response to the incident in Syria represented maintaining the imperfect status quo and corresponded with the traditional U.S. foreign policy in the Greater Middle East.¹²⁵

6.2.1 Obama's "Red Line"

The difference to the Libyan intervention was that Syria obtained efficient armed forces, a modern air defense and most importantly, chemical weapons. Western intelligence confirmed the Syrian dictator used poison gas during at least one attack in 2013 and crossed a "red line" Obama had drawn the year before. Obama sought to punish the regime in case of the usage of chemical weapons.¹²⁶ But a popular disapproval, congressional opposition and lack of support by allies influenced his decision to step back from using force.¹²⁷ Moreover, unlike in Libya, Russia and China prevented a UN resolution. After negotiations between Moscow, Washington, and the UN, Russia proposed to Assad to hand over his chemical weapon arsenal. He succumbed and the international community

122. Fiřtová, Hornát and Sehnálková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 198–99.

123. Lilli, *New Beginning in US-Muslim Relations*, 197.

124. Barbara Plett Usher, "Obama's Syria Legacy: Measured Diplomacy, Strategic Explosion," BBC News, last modified January 13, 2017, accessed April 7, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38297343>.

125. *Ibid.*, 199.

126. Nünlist, "The Legacy of Obama's Foreign Policy," 4.

127. Max J. Rosenthal, "The Neverending Spring: How Syria's Revolution Became A Stalemate," Huffington Post, last modified November 26, 2014, accessed April 7, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/21/syrian-civil-war-arab-spring_n_4550626.html.

was able to destroy the weapons.¹²⁸ Dealing with this crisis without a military intervention can be perceived as a success of international diplomacy. Obama successfully avoided intervention as well as damaging the relationship with Russia. However, it was rather a Russian diplomacy achievement as Syria was dependent on their support.¹²⁹ Many rebel units then realized that America would not provide the needed support and were forced to incline towards Gulf nations.¹³⁰ In this case, Obama's laissez-faire attitude empowered Russia and Iran and strengthened ISIS and al-Qaeda. In addition, it helped to create the worst refugee crisis since WWII, which became a strategic threat to Europe.¹³¹

128. The data on the number of weapons and equipment for their production were repeatedly questioned. In 2018, Assad's regime is still suspected of chemical weapon use. See "The Guardian View on the Syrian Chemical Attack: Assad's Crime – The World's Responsibility," *Guardian*, April 8, 2018, accessed April 9, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/apr/08/the-guardian-view-on-the-syrian-chemical-attack-assads-the-worlds-responsibility>.

129. Fířtová, Hornát and Sehnáľková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 201.

130. Rosenthal, "The Neverending Spring."

131. Usher, "Obama's Syria Legacy."

7 THE RUSSIAN RESET AND RECALIBRATION

The bilateral U.S.-Russian relationship, where cooperation and competition co-exist, belongs to the most critical ones in the world as the implications reach far beyond the two states. Since the end of the Cold War, Russia has been a subject discussed during the U.S. presidential campaigns.¹³² Obama entered the White House hoping to restore the fragile interstate relations, aggravated by Bush's antagonism towards Vladimir Putin's Russia, escalating by the Russo-Georgian War in 2008. Obama decided to avoid criticism and rather pragmatically focused on gaining benefits arising from the potential cooperation. Obama's administration was aware of the Russian influence in matters such as disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation or their ability to block the UN Security Council. Moreover, so-called "rogue states" (e.g. North Korea, Iran or Syria) were by all accounts more willing to cooperate with Russia than the West. However, this approach was predetermined to fail due to Russian foreign policy aimed at undermining U.S. interests.¹³³

In 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton together with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, after overcoming a minor *faux pas*¹³⁴, pressed a 'reset button' to symbolize a *reset* in U.S.-Russia relations. The same year, Obama and former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev publicly announced an inception of mutual cooperation. Since the beginning of Obama's first term in 2009 to the end of Dmitry Medvedev's presidency in 2012, there was a brief improvement in relationships due to various confidence-building steps.¹³⁵ In 2010 an arms reduction treaty called *New START* was signed in Prague, promoting Obama's vision of a world without nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, the treaty contained concessions mainly from the U.S. side.¹³⁶ Furthermore, the two nations collaborated on the Iran

132. Angela Stent, "U.S.-Russia Relations in the Second Obama Administration," Brookings Institution, last modified December 31, 2012, accessed April 9, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/u-s-russia-relations-in-the-second-obama-administration/>.

133. Fířtová, Hornát and Sehnálková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 154-56, 169.

134. While visiting Russia, Clinton symbolically gave Lavrov a red button with 'Reset' written on it. This word was falsely translated into Russian as 'Perezgruzka' (overload) instead of 'Perezagruzka' (reset). See *Ibid.* 167.

135. Fířtová, Hornát and Sehnálková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 171.

136. Josh Gerstein, "Obama Announces New Start Treaty," Politico, last modified March 26, 2010, accessed April 10, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/story/2010/03/obama-announces-new-start-treaty-035081>.

sanctions.¹³⁷ America also supported Russian admission into the World Trade Organization (WTO).¹³⁸

Vladimir Putin's return to the Kremlin in 2012 meant a setback to the Obama administration. Unlike Medvedev, Putin was affected by the past, especially by Bush-era U.S. political influence in Ukraine and other former Soviet republics. Growing up in a Soviet background, then ruling Russian elite was largely influenced by anti-Americanism. One of the beliefs was that America organizes military operations with little regard for Russian opinion.¹³⁹ The Russian military activities did not agree with the *reset* policy. Russia rehearsed extensive military exercises called *Zapad 2009* and *Zapad 2013*, which raised concerns in the neighboring countries. Although warned that the Russian strategic doctrine is changing, Obama decided not to respond.¹⁴⁰

The U.S.-Russia relations only further deteriorated. Putin accused Washington of encouraging protests against him in Moscow in December 2011, aiming to induce revolution and destabilize the national political system. Besides other drawbacks,¹⁴¹ Putin and Obama could not agree on the development of the situation in Syria and Iran, thus blocking any strategic intervention. Russia continued to support Assad's regime and obstructed the imposition of sanctions at the UN Security Council. No negotiations between Russia and the United States were efficient.

In the relationship of these two states, the period of cooperation and antagonism was often alternated. In 2015, Obama reached a milestone and concluded with Russia an agreement on the Iran nuclear program. That was perceived as a revival of the diplomatic relations (*recalibration*), along with the two presidents occasionally exchanging phone calls. The *reset* policy was unsuccessful for various reasons – Putin's reluctance to collaborate under the U.S. conditions, or Obama's concessions and passivity, viewed by

137. Fiřtová, Hornát and Sehnálková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 170.

138. Larry Elliott, "Russia's Entry to WTO Ends 19 Years of Negotiations," *Guardian*, August 22, 2012, accessed April 10, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/economics-blog/2012/aug/22/russia-entry-world-trade-organisation>.

139. Michael Crowley, "Putin's Revenge," *Politico*, last modified December 26, 2010, accessed April 10, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/vladimir-putin-cold-war-revenge-russia-united-states/>.

140. Fiřtová, Hornát and Sehnálková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 172, 177.

141. For example the *Cooperative Threat Reduction Program* was cancelled, the *United States Agency for International Development* was evicted from Russia, or a ban on the broadcasting of US radio stations was issued; on the other hand, the United States passed the *Magnitsky Act*, punishing Russian officials for violation of human rights. See *Ibid.*, 173.

Putin as a sign of weakness. Most of Obama's visions disintegrated when meeting with Putin's aggressive approach.¹⁴²

7.1 The Ukraine Crisis

In November 2013, Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich was about to sign an association agreement with the EU that would form closer ties between Ukraine and the West. As Russia urged and threatened Ukraine, Yanukovich decided not to proceed with the trade agreements and rather expanded relations with Putin. This move sparked mass protests in the streets and pointed out the divide between pro-European west and pro-Russian east of Ukraine. After months of violence and unsuccessful suppression of the dissent, Yanukovich fled Kiev.¹⁴³ Putin's response to the events was outrageous. In March 2014, with the parliamentary approval, Putin sent military forces to Crimea to protect Russian interests.¹⁴⁴ A referendum under Russian surveillance formally annexed then-autonomous Ukrainian region of Crimea to Russia. Ukraine, the US and EU decried it as illegal,¹⁴⁵ by such move Russia violated its fundamental post-war commitments regarding Europe. The West then became worried about Russia's expansionist pursuits.¹⁴⁶

Obama's attitude to the possibility of Putin intervening in Ukraine was skeptical. Days before the invasion, a report was delivered at the Congress claiming there had been no signs of Russian intervention. Obama in his speech warned Russia that their actions would have consequences and reminded of the importance of the Article 5 commitment with NATO to defend one another. Crimea was occupied and U.S. and EU sanctions had been introduced against Russia. Nevertheless, Obama identified it as a "regional problem", thus rather distancing himself. The Kremlin used the *reset* policy to modernize the army, subdue the internal opposition and penetrate the media. Obama's response to this conflict

142. Fiřtová, Hornát and Sehnálková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 190–91.

143. Nick Thompson, "Ukraine: Everything You Need to Know about How We Got Here," CNN.com, last modified February 3, 2017, accessed April 11, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/02/10/europe/ukraine-war-how-we-got-here/index.html>.

144. Crimea provides port access to the Black Sea. If Ukraine developed Crimea's natural gas reserves in partnership with America as planned, Russia would have lost one of the biggest customers and more than \$20 billion. See Thomas Graham, "Who Cares about Ukraine?" Politico, last modified August 26, 2014, accessed April 10, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/08/who-cares-about-ukraine-110347#ixzz3BbRy087L>.

145. Alan Yuhas, "Ukraine Crisis: An Essential Guide to Everything That's Happened So Far," *Guardian*, April 13, 2014, accessed April 10, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/11/ukraine-russia-crimea-sanctions-us-eu-guide-explainer>.

146. More specifically The United Nations Charter (1945), The Budapest Memorandum (1994), The NATO-Russia Founding Act (1997), etc. See Fiřtová, Hornát and Sehnálková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 179–81.

was more than less rhetorical. The German Chancellor Angela Merkel became the main negotiator in this matter. Senator John McCain, a long-standing critic of Obama's policy towards Russia, argued that the United States and its European allies did not do enough to suppress Putin's aggression. McCain pointed out Obama refused to provide Ukraine with means of defense (although being advised to do so) only not to provoke Putin. The long-term neglect of the European defense system resulted in the Ukraine conflict. The Obama administration is not the only culprit, the Bush administration and other European countries also played their part.¹⁴⁷

147. Fiřtová, Hornát and Sehnálková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 181–84, 187–88.

8 THE ASIAN “PIVOT” AND U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS

The U.S.-China relations are one of the most comprehensive bilateral relations – it has been a mixture of confrontational and cooperative elements. The recent economic and geopolitical rise of China initiates speculations about China’s political intentions and America’s role in them. Although Obama’s policy was generally opposed to Bush’s, his predecessor achieved considerable successes in the relationship with Beijing, on which the new president could build.¹⁴⁸ According to Barack Obama, the United States was overinvested in the Middle East and Europe. He wanted to divert attention from Iran and Afghanistan and vowed to shift the primary focus to the economically important Asia-Pacific region. Obama proclaimed that his objective in the U.S. policy toward Asia was to strengthen collaboration with all states in the region, especially China. He pledged to “encourage China to play a responsible role as a growing power” in dealing with the 21st century problems, among other things financial crises, a proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or global warming. Obama also assumed to “compete with China in some areas and cooperate in others.”¹⁴⁹

Nevertheless, already in 2009, it turned out that rather than being a responsible stakeholder, The PRC acted as a reluctant one. The tension between the two states grew along with the reciprocal perception of a rival.¹⁵⁰ The United States identified the Chinese foreign policy, especially in South China Sea, as aggressive.¹⁵¹ On the other hand, the reluctance of the Chinese president Xi Jinping resulted in consolidation of the U.S.-South Korea alliance. The 2010 joint military drills in proximity to China irritated Beijing, which has proved effective. Xi Jinping then exerted pressure on his North Korean ally to limit his threatening military actions. This move can be recognized as a success of the Obama administration.¹⁵²

A deepening Chinese nationalism, caused by domestic policy issues, is partly based on anti-Americanism. There is a fundamental difference in values and in the political system,

148. Ibid., 222–23.

149. Barack Obama, “Renewing American Leadership,” *Foreign Affairs*, July 2007, accessed April 11, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2007-07-01/renewing-american-leadership>.

The importance the Obama administration attributed to diplomatic relations with China is also reflected by the fact that Hillary Clinton made her first foreign trip to Asia (visiting U.S. partners such as Japan, South Korea, Indonesia and finished in Beijing) instead of Europe, which is a custom. See Fířtová, Hornát and Sehnáľková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 223–24.

150. Ibid., 240.

151. Nünlist, “The Legacy of Obama’s Foreign Policy,” 2.

152. Fířtová, Hornát and Sehnáľková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 225.

which lacks transparency in the People's Republic of China (PRC). Despite the changes China has undergone in last decades, it is still a single-party state which contradicts the American ideology. Thus, mutual disagreements often emerge along with a lack of trust. Since the 2008-2009 financial crisis, Americans perceived China more negatively as well – as an economy that was about to overtake theirs. America worried about losing its status of hegemon and being extruded from Asia. The PRC saw the crisis as a U.S. decline and an opportunity to achieve the position of a world power.¹⁵³

Obama had an ambitious plan to improve the U.S.-China relationship. However, as he did not find a cooperative partner in Beijing, in 2011 the Obama administration announced a “pivot” strategy, in order to contain China's hegemonic interests rather than introduce a new approach. Secretary Clinton defined six key lines of action in the Asia-Pacific region: “engaging with regional multilateral institutions; expanding trade and investment; forging a broad-based military presence; and advancing democracy and human rights.”¹⁵⁴ Supporters of the “pivot” claimed that it introduced many new possibilities (e.g. potential alliance with Vietnam and Burma, renewed commitments to partners such as Japan and Australia, etc.) and enabled America to upgrade its strategic position in the region.¹⁵⁵ On the contrary, its opponents considered the “pivot” unnecessary and counter-productive and said it might be understood as an attempt to undermine China's progress.¹⁵⁶ As a matter of fact, China did interpret the strategy negatively due to its prime emphasis on the military aspect. Obama then replaced the word “pivot” with “rebalance” to suppress the adverse reactions. There were also assessments that America would not have enough resources to finance it.¹⁵⁷

In 2014, after years of resistance from the Chinese side, Obama and Xi Jinping announced an agreement to cut greenhouse gas emissions. China's leaders promised to restrict coal consumption by 2030. In 2016, the two biggest carbon dioxide emitters formally ratified the Paris climate change agreement. This accomplishment might as well

153. Ibid., 226.

154. Hillary Clinton, “America's Pacific Century,” *Foreign Policy*, October 11, 2011, accessed April 12, 2018, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/>.

155. Will Inboden, “What Obama's Done Right – And Wrong,” *Foreign Policy*, December 28, 2011, accessed April 12, 2018, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/12/28/what-obamas-done-right-and-wrong/>.

156. Robert S. Ross, “The Problem with the Pivot,” *Foreign Affairs*, November 2012, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2012-11-01/problem-pivot>.

157. Fiřtová, Hornát and Sehnálková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 230.

be Obama's legacy.¹⁵⁸ Another Obama's triumph was negotiating and securing parliamentary authorization for the *Trans-Pacific Partnership* (TPP) in 2015. In 2014, Asia represented the biggest trade partner, thereby being increasingly important for the U.S. domestic policy.¹⁵⁹ The trade deal ensured deepening of economic ties between twelve nations¹⁶⁰ that represented approx. 40 percent of the world's economic output.¹⁶¹ The non-consideration of China was a clear statement and opportunity to put pressure on China.¹⁶² Although Obama managed to strengthen relationships with U.S. traditional partners and did not worsen the U.S.-China relations there was no significant progress as he pledged during the elections.¹⁶³

158. Tom Phillips, Fiona Harvey and Alan Yuhas, "Breakthrough as US and China Agree to Ratify Paris Climate Deal," *Guardian*, September 3, 2016, accessed April 12, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/sep/03/breakthrough-us-china-agree-ratify-paris-climate-change-deal>.

159. Fiřtová, Hornát and Sehnálková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 228.

160. Other 11 members of the TPP: Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam. See "TPP: What Is It and Why Does It Matter?" BBC News, last modified January 23, 2017, accessed April 12, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-32498715>.

161. Fiřtová, Hornát and Sehnálková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 242.

162. Nünlist, "The Legacy of Obama's Foreign Policy," 2.

Withdrawing from the TPP was the one of Donald Trump's first acts after entering the White House, calling it a "horrible deal". See BBC News, "TPP."

163. Fiřtová, Hornát and Sehnálková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 245.

9 IRAN

During the 1979 Iran hostage crisis, Iranian students, supported by then supreme leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, stormed the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and held 52 Americans captive for 444 days.¹⁶⁴ Since then, a framework for the U.S. policy toward Iran was established, alternating between direct diplomacy and absolute isolation.¹⁶⁵ Barack Obama became the sixth American president facing the quandary of how to productively shape relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran.¹⁶⁶ The main aim of the United States was to convince the Iranian regime to stop its nuclear enrichment. Obama's short-term interest was to eliminate Iran as a potential nuclear threat. The long-term pursuit proposed helping Iranian citizens to democratize.¹⁶⁷ The Obama administration inclined to diplomacy, multilateralism and engagement, and therefore challenges arose in various bilateral relationships. But never as much as in the U.S.-Iran relations.

From Obama's perspective was Bush's strategy of "Global War on Terror," based on lumping all the terror sponsors together, inconvenient and expensive. The definition ranked potential partners, including Iran, solely among enemies.¹⁶⁸ Obama chose a more revolutionary approach and publicly declared the willingness to start with Iran an "engagement that is honest and grounded in mutual respect."¹⁶⁹ In an unprecedented 2009 message full of symbolism, the new president directly addressed Iranians and their rulers and introduced an intention to reform the relationship between Washington and Tehran.¹⁷⁰ Obama also sent private letters to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic. However, the results were not as groundbreaking and Tehran's governing regime rejected Obama's outstretched hand.¹⁷¹

Since 2010, the U.S. policy shifted and put an emphasis on economic sanctions and diplomatic means to maximize Iran's international isolation. His first legislative action was signing the *Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act (CISADA)*

164 "Iran Hostage Crisis Fast Facts," CNN.com, last modified October 21, 2017, accessed April 15, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/09/15/world/meast/iran-hostage-crisis-fast-facts/index.html>.

165. Suzanne Maloney, "Progress of the Obama Administration's Policy toward Iran," Brookings Institution, last modified November 15, 2011, accessed April 15, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/progress-of-the-obama-administrations-policy-toward-iran/>.

166. Singh, *Barack Obama's Post-American Foreign Policy*, 90.

167. Majid Sharifi, "Obama's Iran Policy," Huffington Post, last modified March 20, 2010, accessed April 16, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/majid-sharifi/obamas-iran-policy_b_427353.html.

168. Singh, *Barack Obama's Post-American Foreign Policy*, 92.

169. Lilli, *New Beginning in US-Muslim Relations*, 13.

170. Sanger, "Cut Off the Head of the Snake."

171. Singh, *Barack Obama's Post-American Foreign Policy*, 90.

of 2010, which extended the existing sanctions.¹⁷² In the same year, the most severe sanction regime was imposed on Iran – Resolution 1929. The UN Security Council confirmed the non-compliance with the IAEA's (International Atomic Energy Agency) prior resolutions, resulting in an embargo on heavy military equipment, penalties against Iranian firms, ban on nuclear industry investments, strict measures on financial and banking activities, etc.¹⁷³

The possibility of solving the Iranian problem by diplomatic means was increasingly unattainable. The reason was mainly the opposition of the Congress and the public, which perceived Iran as a country “inherently antagonistic to American security interests.” Iran's participation in various conflicts of the Arab Spring only supported the thesis. In connection with the Syria crisis, in 2011 Obama issued an executive order 13572, thus punishing Iran and further raising sanctions. In 2012, Iran and its suspected quest for a nuclear bomb were among Obama's foreign policy priorities. Despite Obama's determination when entering the Office, at the end of 2012, nothing suggested a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear program.¹⁷⁴

Even though the Iranian people were affected by the sanctions significantly, it did not break the leadership to stop with their nuclear program. The major change in the U.S.-Iran relation came in mid-2013 with the election of a new Iranian president – Hassan Rouhani. The new president promised during his campaign to rescue the dwindling Iranian economy and warm ties with the West. He knew that if he wanted to fulfill his vows, the sanctions needed to be canceled. The two presidents exchanged a few letters during the next months. But in September 2013, a phone call between Obama and Rouhani marked an important milestone – the presidents of the two countries spoke together for the first time since 1979. Further conversations occurred between the P5+1 (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States + Germany) and the European Union.

Despite loud objections about Iran's incredibility, the above mentioned signed a *Joint Plan of Action* (JPOA), limiting Iran's nuclear program in exchange for decreased sanctions. Iran for example pledged not to build new nuclear facilities and to limit the operation of centrifuges in Natanz and Fordo, which would be freely accessible by the

172. The new sanctions had rather a symbolic meaning. Iran did not export oil to the United States since 1991. The law impacted mostly consumers of caviar, pistachios and buyers of Persian carpets. See Fiřtová, Hornát and Sehnálková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 212.

173. Singh, *Barack Obama's Post-American Foreign Policy*, 96.

174. Fiřtová, Hornát and Sehnálková, *Prezidentství Baracka Obamy*, 214–15.

IAEA inspectors. In return, Iran was exempted from sanctions. This treaty represents Obama's vision that he introduced in the 2015 National Security Strategy. Obama managed to mediate the first deal Iran and the United States closed since 1979.¹⁷⁵ However, the Congress, especially Republicans, soon objected that the "'deal' will hand Iran billions in sanctions relief while giving it time and space to reach a break-out threshold to produce a nuclear bomb - all without cheating; instead of making the world less dangerous, this 'deal' will only embolden Iran."¹⁷⁶

175. Ibid., 215–218.

176. "Speaker Boehner Statement on Iran Nuclear Agreement," Office of the Speaker of the White House, last modified July 14, 2015, accessed April 18, 2018, <https://www.speaker.gov/press-release/speaker-boehner-statement-iran-nuclear-agreement>.

In 2016, Iran repeatedly violated the JPOA and UN resolutions by test-launching ballistic nuclear-capable missiles and by exceeding its heavy water threshold. See Shahriar Kia, "Iran in 2016: Exploiting Obama's Appeasement Policy," *Hill*, July 1, 2017, accessed April 18, 2018 <http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/313133-iran-in-2016-exploiting-obamas-appeasement-policy>.

10 BREXIT

The Great Britain and the United States have for years shared a “special relationship” because of their cultural and historical ties. The relationship was strengthened mainly by both World Wars and the subsequent Cold War against the Soviet Union. Also by the alliance in the Persian Gulf War, during which a close cooperation between the British Prime Ministers (John Major, Tony Blair) and U.S. Presidents (George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton) was established. Furthermore, British troops joined the United States in the War on Terror. The two nations were central to the creation of NATO and continually discuss the foreign policy affairs and global issues, while sharing major foreign and security policy objectives.¹⁷⁷

In Washington, 2012, Barack Obama and the Prime Minister David Cameron reaffirmed the Anglo-American partnership. Obama, who could not be perceived as an instinctive Atlanticist, was aware that the U.S.-UK alliance was crucial in matters regarding the mission in Afghanistan, the future of Syria’s president Assad or the Iranian nuclear threat.¹⁷⁸ Yet the Asian “pivot” was his major international aspiration. The disorder in Europe and the Middle East (specifically the Ukraine and Syrian migrant crises) were encouraged by the Obama’s reluctant policy and only served as a distraction from his focus on China.¹⁷⁹ When he decided to reverse his Syrian strategy and not punish Assad’s exceedance of the “red line”, the turmoil escalated. The ongoing refugee crises and series of assaults organized by ISIS resulted in a wave of Euroskepticism in Britain.¹⁸⁰

Already in 2013, modern-minded liberal Conservative leader David Cameron promised Britons a referendum on whether the United Kingdom should remain a member of the European Union. The citizens were disturbed by the open borders and eurozone crisis, causing financial obligations. The British citizens worried about their sovereignty and refused the EU regulations. Although being committed to remain in the EU, Cameron

177. Steve Jones, “The U.S. and Great Britain: The Special Relationship after World War II,” Thought.com, last modified February 23, 2018, accessed April 18, 2018, <https://www.thoughtco.com/us-and-great-britain-the-special-relationship-3310124>.

178. Nicholas Watt, “Barack Obama Pays Gushing Tribute to Special Relationship,” *Guardian*, March 14, 2012, accessed April 19, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/mar/14/barack-obama-special-relationship>.

179. Tim Montgomerie, “Obama’s Brexit Overreach Is Typical of His Arrogance,” *Spectator*, April 23, 2016, accessed April 19, 2018, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2016/04/obamas-brexite-overreach-is-typical-of-his-arrogance/>.

180. Saad Khan, “Obama Shares the Blame For Brexit,” Huffington Post, last modified June 24, 2016, accessed April 19, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/saad-khan/obama-shares-the-blame-fo_b_10658138.html.

in 2016 announced the in/out referendum to be held on the 23 June.¹⁸¹ Brexit (shorthand for British exit) raised concerns of many global politicians, Obama included. The U.S. president visited London in April 2016 and during an emotional plea called on Britons to vote for staying in. At the news conference, standing alongside the Prime Minister, Obama stated he came to offer his point of view and warned that if the country decided to leave the EU, it would have to go to the “back of the queue” to achieve any UK-US trade deal. He argued that the U.S. “focus is in negotiating with a big bloc, the European Union.” The worries concerned rather the wider interests than British economy and democracy.¹⁸² Regarding the United States, Brexit threatened their security efforts around the world along with the U.S. economic recovery.¹⁸³

Thus, despite the policy of “leading from behind,” Obama applied a different approach towards Brexit. Many criticized Obama’s remarks and pointed out that it was improper for a foreign leader to intervene in nation’s internal affairs so openly. Polls showed that majority of Britons shared the view.¹⁸⁴ Citizens of the United Kingdom ignored the leaders’ advice and voted to leave the European Union, with a narrow result, after 43 years.¹⁸⁵ As a consequence, David Cameron announced his resignation: “I think the country requires fresh leadership. I do not think I can be the captain to take the country to its next destination.” Despite his popularity in Britain, opinion-poll results suggested that Obama’s intervention contributed to a slight inclination towards the Leave campaign, and strong discontent of most of the voters with his arrogance.¹⁸⁶ Results proved that Obama’s visit backfired. Nigel Farage, the former leader of the UK Independence party, stated that

181. Stephen G. Gross, “The Brexit Vote, One Year Later,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 23, 2017, accessed April 20, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2017-06-23/brexit-vote-one-year-later>.

182. Montgomerie, “Obama’s ‘Brexit’ Overreach Is Typical of His Arrogance.”

183. Matt Spetalnick and Yara Bayoumy, “Brexit Threatens to Undermine U.S.-Britain Special Relationship,” Reuters.com, last modified June 24, 2016, accessed April 21, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-eu-usa-policy-analysis/brexit-threatens-to-undermine-u-s-britain-special-relationship-idUSKCN0ZA351>.

184. Krishnadev Calamur, “Obama’s ‘Brexit’ Plea,” *Atlantic*, April 22, 2016, accessed April 21, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/04/obamas-brexit-plea/479469/>.

185. More than 30 million people voted, with the referendum turnout being 71.8%. Leave won by 51.9% to 48.1%. See Alex Hunt and Brian Wheeler, “Brexit: All You Need to Know about the UK Leaving the EU,” BBC News, last modified April 12, 2018, accessed April 21, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-32810887>.

186. John O’Sullivan, “Brexit after Obama,” *National Review*, April 29, 2016, accessed April 22, 2018, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2016/04/president-obamas-brexit-intervention/>.

Barack Obama was unconsciously responsible for pushing Britain out of the European Union.¹⁸⁷

187. David Smith, “Thanks, Obama: Nigel Farage Says US President Helped Make Brexit a Reality,” *Guardian*, July 20, 2016, accessed April 22, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jul/20/nigel-farage-barack-obama-brexit-london-republican-convention>.

CONCLUSION

During the 2008 campaign, Barack Obama gained national and international admiration as he not only articulated but also symbolized the change. He was determined to restore America's global trust and improve relationships with other nations. Unlike his predecessors, Obama claimed that America cannot face the threats of the 21st century alone and conversely, the world cannot meet them without America. For the first time in modern American history, the U.S. president showed ambivalence toward the idea of America's singular greatness and the "city upon a hill" motif. The president came into office with the view of being primarily a domestic president and the foreign affairs served as a distraction. The anti-exceptionalism shaped his "leading from behind" profile abroad, which became an accurate description of Obama's restrained approach and domestic priorities.¹⁸⁸ Obama managed to achieve number of foreign policy initiatives, such as concluding agreements with China, eliminating al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and negotiating a deal limiting Iran's nuclear program. Nevertheless, during his 8-year presidency, he failed to bring a fundamental change that would reshape and strengthen U.S. role in the world.

By analyzing particular bilateral relations, this thesis proved that Obama's foreign policy was overall a failure. Obama had to break his campaign promises and left the next president with a significant military presence in both Iraq and Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, Washington toppled the regimes but did not adequately plan for the aftermath, thus Obama was repeatedly "winning the war and losing the peace." The fast withdrawal from these states only created an opportunity for terrorist groups such as ISIS to rise. Obama's laissez-faire attitude toward the Syrian Civil War contributed to the evolution of Europe's refugee crisis. Too often has Obama avoided taking action, waiting for conditions to improve or seeking consensus. He was criticized for being too respectful of Russia, Putin viewed Obama's concessions as a weakness and used the *reset* policy to his advantage. On the other hand, Obama's assertive attempt to intervene during Brexit negatively affected the Remain campaign, pushing Britain out of the European Union. He also failed to fulfill his campaign promise to close the Guantanamo Bay detention camp due to congressional opposition over where to house the prisoners.¹⁸⁹

188. Singh, *Barack Obama's Post-American Foreign Policy*, 65.

189. Kedar Pavgi, "Barack Obama's Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy*, November 17, 2011, accessed April 23, 2018, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/11/17/barack-obamas-foreign-policy/>.

As a result, his foreign policy missteps helped propel Obama's opposite – Donald Trump, current Republican president, into the White House. The Trump administration, characterized by nationalism and protectionism, abandons Obama's vision of America as a global partner. According to Trump, Obama's policy was weak and inefficient, thus he campaigned with a slogan "Make America Great Again." Only time will reveal whether Obama's legacy will survive Trump's presidency.¹⁹⁰

190. Kevin Liptak and Jeff Zeleny, "Trump Pledges to 'Make America Great Again for All Americans'," CNN.com, last modified January 31, 2018, accessed April 23, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/30/politics/state-of-the-union-2018/index.html>.

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