

Change in the us’s foreign policy during Obama’s tenure and its effect on middle east and terrorism issue

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ABSTRACT

The states’ foreign policy is a function of various national abilities and power and it is directly associated with the elements of the countries’ national power. The changes in the levels of the countries’ national power brings changes about in their foreign policies for a reason or another. In the aftermath of the attack on 11th of September, Bush started wars in Middle East with the excuse of the fight against terrorism. The result of these wars was not favored by the US and a lot of hefty costs were imposed thereon. Barack Obama who had taken the rudder of power in his hands with the slogan of “change” was forced to revise the US’s foreign policy considering the then circumstances and with the goal of adapting to the new post-crisis domestic and international conditions. In other words, the essence of the changes in Obama government’s foreign policy is laid on efforts for adapting to the new domestic and international conditions and requirements, reconstruction of the crisis-stricken economy and repair of the US’s international prestige. The present article aims at investigating the US’s foreign policy change during Obama’s presidency and its effect on the Middle East and terrorism issue based on a case study through documentary theory proposition; the data collection has been based on library research and note-taking. Based thereon, meanwhile investigating the general strategy of Obama’s foreign policy and the role of the soft and smart power therein, the present study tries analyzing his foreign policy in the Middle East as well as his strategy against terrorism.

Keywords: the US’s foreign policy, Obama’s presidency, Middle East, terrorism

Introduction

In 21st century, the US was faced with domestic and foreign policies. In 2001, the attack by a nongovernmental actor on the US caused changes in the people’s traditional perspectives about the safeness of their homeland. Following the attack on the twin towers, Bush government started a worldwide war against terrorism and assaulted Afghanistan and Iraq. The result of this militaristic and invasive policy was damage to the US’s stance in the world and imposition of financial pressure on this country’s economy ^[1]. The eroding nature of Iraq war and the heightening of the costs of war caused budget deficits to the federal government and imbalance of the payments until the US finally was inflicted with an economic depression in 2008. In such a

setting, the US encountered two kinds of crisis in the international and domestic arenas. In the international domain, the decline in the US’s international legitimacy, decrease in its hegemonic role and increase in the importance of the role and power of the other international actors known as newly emerging countries came about ^[2]. Generally, in George Bush’s preemptive war space, the US’s political visage had been blemished before the public international thoughts and the various countries’ mentalities became completely negative about the US’s regional and international role. This was the product and reflection of the pervasive and extensive conflict setting created by the US in various countries around the globe. Under such conditions, new anti-American waves appeared.

After Barack Obama’s victory over the democrat party in 2008’s elections, an essential shift was created in the US’s foreign policy. Obama who had taken the rudder of power in his hands with the slogan of change and kept on using concepts like “new start”, “fresh beginning” and “a new day” adopted a different strategy following power takeover in contrast to George Bush in the US’s foreign policy with his slogan of change announcing the good news of essential change in this country’s foreign policy ^[1]. In general, Obama was seeking to corroborate and legitimize the

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international institutions by shouting the slogan of change and, emphasizing on multilateralism, he disapproved unilateralism in the foreign policy and, based thereon, he reduced the US's defense budget ^[1]. Obama's smart power and foreign policy caused the creation of an essential turn in the US's foreign policy within the framework of the slogan of change after his winning of the election. The essence of this turn was placing "smart power" in the context of the US's foreign policy ^[3]. On the other hand, the importance and international status of the Middle East have always caused this region to be posited as one of the most challenging areas of the US's foreign policy in such a way that some experts believe that it has become difficult to offer a certain policy about the Middle East which is connected to the other spots of the word more than any other region by Obama's government in the situation that the international ties are transiting towards new conditions ^[4]. Some studies have been conducted in this regard. Karimifard (2015) expresses in a study named "investigation and criticism of Obama's foreign policy" that while Bush's foreign policy has been laid on the unilateralism and emphasis on the acquisition of security and interest based on a hardware method, Obama organized his foreign policy about multilateralism, soft power, public diplomacy, democracy and international regulations ^[1]. In a research called "changes in the US's foreign policies and Middle East evolutions", Pourahmadi and Mansourian (2014) stated that the US's financial and economic crisis in 2008 played an important role in the changes brought about in the US's foreign policy during the recent years by revealing as well as intensifying the descending trends of the US's national power elements ^[2]. Based thereon, the present article tries studying several study cases and proposing documentary theories through library research-based data gathering thereby to investigate the US's foreign policy change during Obama's presidency and its effect on the Middle East and terrorism issue.

Study's Theoretical Foundations

Obama's Foreign Policy

During 2002 to 2006, ground was set for the criticism of George Bush's behavioral patterns in the US's political structure. Military attack on Iraq, the war's becoming erosive and expansion of crisis in the various geographical domains are manifestations of chaotic empire. Under such conditions, the US's political structure had to apply a pattern that prevented its being displayed as a chaotic empire but this structure also had a lot of extensive and costly commitments for the US in the peripheral regions. In line with such commitments, signs of economic crisis started showing during 2005 to 2006 ^[4].

Generally, a sort of governance of terror in the US and an unprecedented staining of the US's visage and declined legitimacy of its interventions in global level are witnessed in the international arena in the course of war against terrorism. In the domestic arena, as well, manifestations of the effectiveness crisis appeared in the area of the US's domestic structure. In other words, the support of George Bush's rightist-inclined policies

relying on Reaganomics teachings that were mostly in favor of the wealthy class and based on reduction of the tax rates, deregulation and, in one word, a small government caused the creation of an irresponsible financial system with the bankruptcy of many of the large money-lending business entities and finally reduction in the values of the stock shares and large Wallstreet Companies being the results of such evolutions ^[5].

It was under such circumstances that Barack Obama became the US's president following the elections in which the American citizens proved a participation by 62.6% as an unexampled percentage during the past forty years. Obama received 365 votes against 173 votes given for McCain and became the 44th president of the USA.

Soft and Smart Power in Obama's Foreign Policy

It was due to the war's becoming erosive and reduction of the US's international legitimacy during Bush's tenure that Obama started emphasizing on the soft power indicators and persuasion methods like public ties, relations with the nations, public diplomacy and impression on the public thoughts. In general, the US is currently using soft power to stabilize its hegemonic position because the distribution of the power resources has undergone evolutions and the power cannot anymore appear in military aspect and hard force rather the power has been extensively and irregularly distributed between the states and nongovernmental and transregional actors in the last level of the international interactions such as terrorism, international crimes, climatic changes and outbreak of the contagious diseases hence it is not rational to see the world as being unipolarly managed by the US as its emperor. Therefore, the mere military power is not the primary factor for the stabilization and continuation of power ^[6]; rather, the emphasis is made on a different spectrum of resources, including "its culture (where it is deemed fascinating by others), its political values (when they are adhered to) and its foreign policy (when it is realized as legitimate and possessing ethical credibility)" (soft power and foreign policy of the USA, subjective, historical and contemporary perspectives, 2011, p.72). These are reflective of the increasing importance given to soft power and diplomacy and power of persuasion as Obama's foreign policy indicators and priorities.

Smart power means combining the hard and soft powers for constituting a cautious method for smart use of power in the foreign policy of a country ^[3]. In the course of his election campaign as well as during his presidency, Obama had tendencies towards the application of the smart power theory in the US's foreign policy, particularly in regard of Middle East region. In fact, smart power is the substantive strategic aspect of Obama in the Middle East and he wanted to change and recreate the political attitude and culture of the target communities based thereon for safeguarding the US's interests and national security ^[7].

Obama's Foreign Policy in the Middle East

Considering the position and importance of the Middle East for the US, this country has always been seeking within the format of various policies to infiltrate into this region and gain control over its issues^[8]. In the aftermath of September, 11th, and upon the emergence of the required excuse for US's direct presence in the Middle East region during Bush's presidency and following the imposition of heavy costs and many financial damages onto the US by this presence as a result of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Barack Obama adopted a different strategy in respect to the Middle East and its issues such as terrorism after victory in the US's 2008 election.

After Obama became the president, he placed multilateralism and application of smart power in respect to the Middle East in its foreign policy's priority list with his slogan of change in the course of elections as well as following the 2008's economic crisis due to the reduction in the US's international legitimacy and endangering of the US's international prestige^[9]. In this regard, Obama government's priority was maximal concentration on domestic issues and making efforts for economic reconstruction and avoidance of imposition of new costs on the crisis-stricken economy of this country. Some of the experts recount this situation as the kidnapping of the US's foreign policy by Obama's promises about domestic policy^[2]. Middle East did not have its former special stance in Obama government's foreign policy. The forthcoming section deals with the reasons for such a change in Obama's foreign policy in respect to the Middle East.

A. Occurrence of Economic Crisis in the US in 2008:

After Obama held the presidency tenure and under the circumstances that the US's global status had been weakened due to crisis and, on the other hand, new powers had emerged in the international arena, he started focusing on the domestic affairs and improvement and repair of the US's economic power. In fact, the 2008's crisis and its outcomes convinced many individuals in the US and Middle East that the USA does not anymore have the resources required for continuing its imperialist presence in the Middle East and that dealing with the domestic issues is more vital and more significant for the USA and Obama.

B. Occurrence of Islamic-Arabic Revolutions:

The occurrence of Arabic spring and its outcomes rendered the then status quo turbulent and caused many instabilities and guided the political forces towards making their minds for vivid accompaniment of Washington and if the US's reactions towards the Arabic uprisings and evolutions are compared with this country's foreign policy after WWII, we will surely figure out this country's limitations in its foreign policy due to its recent (2008) financial crisis^[10].

C. The Policy of Concentration on Asia:

During the late years of Obama's first presidency tenure, the talks about concentration on the strategic affairs of Asia and

pacific ocean region were seriously pursued by the American government. This new strategy was introduced under the title of "turn towards Asia". Due to its high economic growth during the recent decades as well as the economic position and rank of China as the sole rival of the US, this region has drawn the strategic concerns and worries of the US. The adoption of this policy by Obama's government is indicative of the idea that the Middle East is no more the primary strategic center of the US's foreign policy^[9].

D. Discovery of Huge Extractable Oil Fields in the Northern US (Shale Oil Revolution):

Reduction in the dependency on eastern hemisphere's energy resources brought about decreases in the US's need for taking measures therein, especially the US's need for engaging in and worrying about Persian Gulf. Of course, this dependency decrease did not mean the US's complete exit of this region and its delegation to its regional and global rivals rather the USA and Obama's government were making efforts through multilateralism and support of the regional allies and avoidance of direct intervention in the regional and global crises and issues due to the incurring of a lot of material and intellectual costs to delegate this duty to US's trusted regional allies through, as it is commonly termed, adopting regional balance preservation policy thereby to enforce its own intended and favored order in the world^[9].

Obama's Strategy In Respect To Terrorism

Obama's government declared its goal of fighting with terrorism as being not only defending the US and preservation of its liberal democratic values but also defending the other nations and preservation of the human values. From the perspective of Obama's government, the goal of fighting with terrorism was actualization of freedom, justice, parity, veneration, hope and opportunity. Considering his analysis of the source and formation quality of terrorism, Obama navigated the fight with terrorism towards efforts for changing the structure of the Islamic countries, especially in the Middle East. In Obama's mind, the existence of the dictator and monarchic governments in the Middle East was illegitimate hence resulted in the people and dissidents' joining of the extremist and terroristic groups for actualizing their rights (USA's national security strategy, 2010, p.23).

Conclusion

Barack Obama took the rudder of power in his hands with his slogan of change and, after holding the tenure and considering the then conditions, he was forced to revise the USA's foreign policy with the objective of adapting to the new domestic and international conditions in the aftermath of the crisis. In general, the new evolutions in the USA's foreign policy, including more emphasis on multilateralism in global level, adoption of a policy of concentration on Asia, termination of the policy for fighting

with terrorism and non-willingness for direct presence in all the important and strategic regions worldwide, all along with the booming of oil and gas industry in the US (shale oil revolution) caused changes in the strategy of Obama's foreign policy in respect to the Middle East. On the other hand, Middle East is one of the most important centers of dispute and controversy in the world. This region has been involved in a lot of clashes during the late years of 20th century and early years of 21st century. Probably, no other region in the world has ever been faced with controversies to the same extent of the Middle East. Apart from the geopolitical importance of the Middle East region the destiny of which was interlaced with the international metamorphoses and the large powers' interests during the 20th century, this region is per se prone to stable structural and, in the meanwhile, intensively destabilizing problems. These structures predominantly exert negative effects on the security zone of the Middle east. One of these problems is the nonexistence of accountable political systems, independent civil institutions and strong democratic traditions. Most of the political systems seize power non-democratically and tend to act independently more than drawing their pillars of legitimacy and power in relation to the people and their will. Middle East is also a region prone to the emergence and formation of Islamic groups and fanatic religious movements as well as extremist cliques. Obama believed that Bush's policies towards the Middle East have been wrong and they should not be continued. In Obama's opinion, the US had the capacity of leading the world but he realized this leadership as being facilitated in the companionship of others.

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