



BARACK OBAMA'S 100 DAYS AS PRESIDENT

It is too early to assess the success of Obama's administration. Yet, no major clash or surprises have occurred during the first 100 days of Obama's presidency. The President's hyper activity and his presence on all national and international fronts are accepted by the population. They are tempered by his apparent moderate words, and calm and cold-blooded ways of negotiating. Two thirds of Americans share a positive image of the US President and 72% of them remain optimistic about the future despite the crisis.

In national politics, Obama's administration has been able to show the inadequacy of a capitalist economy grounded in the deregulation of financial markets and uncontrolled consumerism. « *The State is the problem* » used to say Reagan. Obama could say « *the State is the solution to our problems* ». State interventionism would, according to Obama's entourage, be able to prevent a long-term recession. Nothing is really guaranteed despite the 700 billion dollars voted by Congress to boost the economy. The financial stability plan has yet to be completed. Nobody knows either the total amount of losses banks have suffered, or the outcome of the stress tests imposed to banks by the US federal administration.

More than 5 million people have lost their jobs in less than two years. Consumers, threatened by the rapid loss of value of their investments, have started saving their money in order to prepare for a difficult future. Should banks have been (temporarily) nationalized? Should infrastructure expenses be better encouraged? Should the fiscal policy of income redistribution be furthered? This is what leftist democrats and economists, such as Paul Krugman and Joseph Stiglitz, argue. The real test for Obama's administration will concern issues like health policy, educational programs, and environmental protection.

In foreign policy, there are many encouraging signs showing a real change, and even a real rupture with *Bushism*. Some issues of international relations such as leaving Iraq, reinforcing the army in Afghanistan and improving relations with Europe had been announced and prepared during the last months of George W. Bush's mandate. But again, when Obama gives such importance to Turkey and insists the country becomes part of the European Union, not only is he exceeding his role as the President of the United States of America, but he is also pursuing neocon politics and in particular that of Albert Wohlstetter (mentor and PhD supervisor of Paul Wolfowitz) who had always given a special role to Turkey in his strategic analyses¹. The announced closing of Guantanamo, the prohibition of torture and thus of a politics of "end justifying means", the publication of compromising notes from the CIA and the Department of Justice mark a real rupture with *Bushism*. Other signs may be noticed, such as openings toward Iran, Russia, Cuba, Venezuela and Muslim countries in general. In his inaugural address of January 20th, 2009, Obama was the first President ever, to declare that America was not a Christian nation but "(...) a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and nonbelievers." He was also the first US President to declare during his speech to the Turkish Parliament on April 6th: « The United States is not, and will never be, at war with Islam ». He couldn't have better buried the Axis of Evil and the rhetoric of terror favored by George W. Bush.

Barack Obama has obviously worked hard to restore the image of the United States in the world. Crucial decisions remain to be made when it comes to the Israel/Palestine conflict, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, China, Cuba... The first 100 days of Obama have allowed the new President to show his openness and good will, while insisting on the virtues of multilateralism. What will these good intentions reveal? How firm will he be in the Middle East? What importance will he give to his European allies? It is yet too early to give answers. « Forget the 100 days, some experts say, it is the 200 that count »². Like Roosevelt, Obama is an excellent communicator, using the tools of his time: television, Internet, blogosphere. His unruffled, confident and smiling language represents one of his best assets for the symbolic success of the first 100 days. A further 100 days and the stress tests will apply to him as they will to the banks. Then, we will be able to make our opinion on the basis of tangible facts.

¹ On this topic see Justin Vaïsse, *Histoire du néoconservatisme aux États-Unis*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 2008. On George W. Bush's foreign policy, see *La Présidence impériale de Franklin D. Roosevelt à George W. Bush* (ed. D. Lacorne and J. Vaïsse), Paris, Odile Jacob, 2007 and in an even more complete historical perspective Pierre Melandri, *Histoire des États-Unis contemporains*, André Versailles éditeur, 2008.

² Corine Lesnes, « Barack Obama, la volonté de changer les règles et de concilier les antagonismes », *Le Monde*, 30 April, 2009.

The four papers below are all devoted to various new aspects of Barack Obama's national policy and foreign policy. They are an invitation for further directions for reflection. The papers identify trends, elements of rupture and continuity, and signs of change in the relationship between the US and Europe.