

American Foreign Policy & The Muslim World

Edited by

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Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations

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**Al-Zaytouna Centre
For Studies & Consultations
Beirut - Lebanon**

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السياسة الخارجية الأمريكية والعالم الإسلامي

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First published in 2009 by:

Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations

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ISBN 978-9953-500-65-2

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Interior Design:

Marwa Ghalayini

Cover Design:

Hareth Adlouni

Printed by:

Golden Vision sarl + 961 1 820 434

Chapter Fourteen

Foreign Policy of Barack H. Obama: A New Direction for America?

Dr. Ishtiaq Hossain

Foreign Policy of Barack H. Obama: A New Direction for America?*

Introduction

Kishore Mahbubani thinks that Washington's manifest and growing problems with the world seem to have a single cause: America, as a geopolitical actor, has stopped thinking and acting strategically.¹ He concludes that if America could once again begin thinking and acting strategically, many of its problems with the world, including with the Islamic world, could be resolved fairly easily.² Would America be thinking and acting strategically with a new president in the White House in January 2009? The elections of 4 November 2008 of the Democratic Party presidential candidate Senator Obama from Illinois was a historic one due to a number of reasons. He is the first ever Afro-American to be elected to occupy the Oval office at the White House. He is also the first Democratic Party presidential candidate who won not only the traditional Blue (Democratic) states like California, New York etc., but also won the Red (Republican) states like Virginia, North Carolina, and states like Ohio, Florida, Colorado, Nevada and New Mexico which had voted for Republican President George W. Bush in 2000 and 2004.

Obama will enter the White House in January 2009 with a clear mandate to govern. He did not just win the Electoral College handsomely; he has the full backing of a Democratic Congress. He is the first Democrat since Jimmy Carter to win more than 50% of the vote. Scenes of jubilation of hundreds and thousands of celebrating people on the streets of not only American cities but all major cities of the world testified to their support for him and desire to see a change in Washington's domestic and foreign policy.

At the time of his inauguration as the 43rd president of the US in 2001, George W. Bush was expected to follow a "humbler and less expensive foreign policy."³ But it was not to be. Re-elected in 2004, President Bush's era (2001-2008) have been marked by unilateralism, pre-emptive use of force against two countries (Afghanistan and Iraq) and the continuing wars in these countries, torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib jail in Baghdad and Guantanamo Bay prison, extraordinary rendition of foreign citizens in European and other

* This chapter was written before the inauguration of Barack H. Obama as the 44th president of the United States on 20 January 2009. Thus he is referred to as the "president-elect" throughout the chapter.