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**2008 US Presidential  
Election**



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## **US Presidential Candidates Foreign Policy Positions**

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The unfolding political and economic crisis in the United States has propelled a strong constituency for change and leadership in the 2008 elections among the American electorate. The prospects of the Democrat candidate winning the elections are buoyed by the discredited policies of the Bush administration, the troubled economy and an increasingly costly war on terror. Yet the contest between the two presidential hopefuls- Senator John McCain (Republican) and Senator Barack Obama (Democrat)- remains close, particularly in their foreign policy outlooks.

While Senator John McCain is viewed as the “old war-horse, a veteran of Washington's national security fights, and thus, left largely to defend the Bush administration’s policies”, Senator Obama projects himself as “a leader from a new generation with a broader and more global outlook”. As a result, the foreign policy positions of the two candidate’s requires a close study in terms of their world views as enunciated through various debates, conventions, campaign commercials, platforms and speeches. Will there be a change in their foreign policy formulations or will it be a mere continuation of the past? Though the options available to the next president will be limited by the Bush administration’s legacy, how the next administration will choose from that limited set of choices calls for a careful examination.

### **Democrat’s Diplomacy versus Republican’s Competing Influences**

Senator Barack Obama's foreign policy plank has largely emphasised on “multilateralism and reinvigorated diplomacy” to advance US interests around the world, in sharp contrast to the elements of unilateralism in the approach of his Republican opponent. Obama has pledged to take steps to end the war in Iraq soon after taking office and to negotiate with the leadership of US adversaries like Iran and Cuba. He principally believes in the

reinvigorated role of diplomacy and emphasises that it is “important for the United States not just to talk to its friends but also to talk to its enemies.” He feels that diplomacy has been undervalued over the past few years and that the US should not fear to negotiate with its adversaries. The Obama campaign includes several senior ranking Clinton administration officials, the Brookings Institution's Susan E. Rice, former National Security Adviser Anthony Lake, and former Navy Secretary Richard Danzig who are reflective of such thinking.

Senator John McCain's foreign policy outlook has an unusual blend of realism, neo-conservatism and is termed as “middle-of-the road internationalist”. His presidential campaign has underscored his diverse foreign policy experience derived from his time as a naval aviator and later from his term in the US Senate. McCain’s grand strategy includes “a special place for the US as a leader in promoting freedom and global security”, as envisioned in his foreign policy speech in Los Angeles on March 26, 2008. It calls for the ousting of Russia from the Group of Eight industrialized nations. In the speech, McCain described himself as a “realistic idealist” who abhors war and emphasizes the importance of respecting allies. McCain's advisers include a diverse array of veteran party strategists and former top policymakers and media reports indicate an evolving tussle or jockeying for influence between policy pragmatists and a mixture of so-called neo-conservatives over the global projection of US power. The McCain campaign's foreign policy coordinator is Randy Scheunemann, a former top legislative aide for Republicans on Capitol Hill, including two former leaders of the Senate, Trent Lott and Bob Dole. The campaign also lists Kagan as a leading foreign policy adviser.

### **Iraq, Afghanistan & the War on Terror**

In general, Obama has been overtly critical of the Bush administration's policies relating to the war on terror. In a July 2007 *Foreign Affairs* article, Obama called the Bush administration's response to 9/11 “conventional thinking of the past, largely viewing problems as state-based and principally amenable to military solutions.” As a result of the actions taken under the auspices of the war on terror, Obama says, “the world has lost

trust in our purposes and our principles.” Obama says Iraq is not and “never was” the main front of the war on terror. In September 2007, Obama released his plan to “responsibly end the war in Iraq” calling for a complete redeployment of US troops from Iraq by the end of 2009, starting immediately. He also advocates an UN-led Iraqi constitutional convention in order to forge national reconciliation and to reach compromises on federalism, oil revenue sharing, and "de-Ba'athification."

During his July 2008 visit to Afghanistan, Obama described the country as a central front in the battle against terrorism and called for the immediate redeployment of some US combat forces from Iraq to Afghanistan. Obama, in fact, argued the troop surge in Iraq has caused the situation in Afghanistan to deteriorate. In various other forums, Obama has said that he would send at least two more combat brigades to Afghanistan and will "use this commitment to seek greater contributions—with fewer restrictions—from NATO allies." He has also proposed an additional billion dollars in non-military assistance per year, “with meaningful safeguards to prevent corruption and to make sure investments are made—not just in Kabul—but out in Afghanistan's provinces.” Obama has also indicated, during an October 2008 interview with TIME magazine, that opportunities to negotiate with the Taliban should be "explored."

McCain, on the other hand, seeks a clear victory in Iraq, even while regretting the decision of “washing US hands of Afghanistan” after the Soviets were compelled to withdraw from the country. He is one of the most outspoken proponents of Bush’s surge strategy, even arguing that the escalation does not go far enough. He argues that Iraq remained the primary front in the war on terror, even though there is requirement of additional troops in Afghanistan, a part of which should be supplied by the NATO. In a July 2008 speech McCain said that the troop surge in Iraq should serve as a model for counter-insurgency strategy in Afghanistan. He said he would implement an integrated “civil-military campaign plan that is focused on providing security for the population.” His “comprehensive strategy for victory in Afghanistan,” includes the appointment of an “Afghanistan Czar” based in the White House.

**Pakistan**

Instability and violence in Pakistan has increased during the US presidential campaign. Given the country's importance to the US led War on terror, its deteriorating security situation has served as a 'litmus test' for candidates seeking to project their seriousness in fighting the war on terror.

Obama during the summer of 2007 presidential campaign said he believed the US should hunt al Qaeda forces in Pakistan. "If we have actionable intelligence about high-value terrorist targets and President [Pervez] Musharraf will not act, we will," he said. Obama says the "growing sanctuary" for al Qaeda in Pakistan is a result of failed military strategy in Iraq. The US needs a policy that "compels Pakistani action against terrorists who threaten our common security and are using the FATA and the Northwest Territories of Pakistan as a safe haven", Obama said in a July 2008 speech. Obama also maintains that the policy of too much military aid to Pakistan has been counter-productive in the absence of "not enough of it has been in the form of building schools and building infrastructure in the country to help develop and give opportunity to the Pakistani people."

McCain, on the other hand, has advocated continued US cooperation with the Pakistani government to "dismantle the cells and camps that the Taliban and al Qaeda maintain in his country." In a November 2007 *Foreign Affairs* essay, he warned that the "Talibanization of Pakistani society is advancing," and said the US should make "a long-term commitment to the country." This would include bolstering Pakistan's security capabilities to enhance "Pakistan's ability to act against insurgent safe havens." He differs from Obama's policy of launching military strikes into Pakistan and has maintained that he is "not prepared at this time to cut off aid to Pakistan."

**India**

With India's rising power status, presidential candidates are making a wide-ranging effort to appeal to the large Indian American constituency (nearing two million as of the last census in 2000) demanding immigration reform, a strong geo strategic partnership with the United States, and a viable plan for combating HIV/AIDS and other public health crises in India. The influential political lobbies like the U.S. India Political Action Committee (USINPAC) have also played important role. India's rising economy, the nuclear deal, outsourcing and India's role combating environmental problems like climate change are among the prominent issues in the current US policy deliberations.

Not surprisingly, India remains one of the points of convergence for both the candidates. Obama has deflected from his earlier position as an opponent of the Indo-US nuclear deal and would opt for a "close strategic partnership" with India if he is elected president. Obama voted to approve the US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement in October 2008 and the United States-India Energy Security Cooperation Act of 2006. McCain, similarly, has noted India's potential to be one of the "natural allies" of the US. He stresses the "importance of securing greater U.S. market access to [India's] economy of a billion consumers." In a March 2008 speech, McCain said he believes India should be included in the G-8. In a May 2008 speech on nuclear security, McCain said he supports the US-India Civil Nuclear Accord "as a means of strengthening our relationship with the world's largest democracy, and further involving India in the fight against proliferation."

**Russia & Europe**

Both McCain and Obama essentially agree on the need for a new policy to face a more hostile Russia, on NATO enlargement, and support for young democracies in Georgia and Ukraine. McCain has spoken at length about Russia's "strong-arm tendencies" and "autocratic ways under Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev". He has called for ending Russian participation in the Group of Eight and blocking its admission to the World Trade Organization.

In Obama's view Russia is neither an "enemy nor close ally and the US "shouldn't shy away from pushing for more democracy, transparency, and accountability" there. He called for an evaluation of the US policy towards Russia as "a resurgent and very aggressive Russia is a threat to the peace and stability of the region." He called Russia's August 2008 actions toward Georgia "unacceptable" and "unwarranted."

Europe received only subtle importance in the speeches of both candidates. Obama supported the right of Georgia and Ukraine to join NATO whereas McCain outlined his plan to expand US efforts, together with the French, British and German allies, to influence Iranian behaviour. Neither candidate dwelled on the important European contributions to the NATO mission in Afghanistan, even though McCain expressed support for President Bush's plan to build a missile defence shield in Eastern Europe.

## **Iran**

Both candidates agree that the US "cannot tolerate a nuclear Iran" and both see reinforced diplomacy, with strengthened sanctions as the central instrument of solution to the stand off.

McCain who has called Iran the "chief state sponsor of terrorism" thinks that a "worldwide divestment campaign" against Iran, could cause Iran's "radical elite" to become "even more unpopular than they are already." Obama views Iran's nuclear ambitions as a serious threat to the US, Israel and the international security. A nuclear Iran would be "a game changer," he said in a September 2008 presidential debate. He, however, has expressed support for "opening dialogue", through a "tough, direct presidential diplomacy" with Iran, in part to ask for its assistance in "playing a more constructive role in Iraq." He supports "tough sanctions" on Iran to compel it to stop its uranium enrichment programme. He also has said that he "does not believe that the use of military force towards Iran should be ruled out." At the same time, albeit in confusing terms, he opines that "it would be a profound mistake for us to initiate a war with Iran."



In similar lines, McCain has maintained that use of military force in Iran should be “the last option but cannot be taken off the table.”

### **Middle East**

Senator Obama adopts a pro-Israel stance while addressing the Palestine problem. He has said that said the concept of a Jewish state is “fundamentally just” and his commitment to Israeli security is “non-negotiable”. His policy further includes strengthening the hands of Palestinian moderates and isolating the radical Hamas. If elected, Obama has maintained, he would “insist on fully funding military assistance to Israel”.

Senator McCain, on the other hand, argues that there can be no peace process “until the Palestinians recognize Israel, forswear forever the use of violence, recognize their previous agreements, and reform their internal institutions.” Ardently pro-Israel, McCain maintains that he would be willing to use military force against Iran if it attains a nuclear weapon and poses a “real threat” to Israel.

Both candidates appear unanimous on the goal of promoting democracy in the Arab world. Obama has said the US would benefit from “the expansion of democracy”. He plans to “significantly increase” funding for the National Endowment for Democracy and other non-governmental organizations to support civic activists in repressive societies. In a similar tone, McCain maintains, “The promotion of democracy and freedom is simply inseparable from the long-term security of the United States.”

### **China & East Asia**

There appears to be very little disagreement on either North Korea or China among both the candidates, apart from differences over nuance and tactics. Both prescribe engagement with a hedge. Using almost the same set of words which he used to describe Russia, Obama maintains that China is “neither our enemy nor our friend.” “They're competitors. But we have to make sure that we have enough military-to-military contact

and forge enough of a relationship with them that we can stabilize the region”, he adds. Obama has called for “genuine and meaningful autonomy” for Tibet.

McCain has maintained “Until China moves toward political liberalization, our relationship will be based on periodically shared interests rather than the bedrock of shared values.” He denounced China's March 2008 crackdown on Tibetan protesters and urged China to “address the root causes of unrest in Tibet by opening a genuine dialogue” with the Dalai Lama. He has favoured the maintenance of military presence in East Asia, strengthening alliance with Japan and relations with other Asian countries, and working through regional groupings like the APEC forum to further American interests and values.

Obama advocates developing an “international coalition” to handle nuclear North Korea through “sustained, direct, and aggressive diplomacy.” He maintains that much of the problem with North Korea has aggravated due to the lack of dialogue with that country. On the other hand, McCain termed North Korea as the “most repressive and brutal regime probably on Earth” and has said that he would not negotiate with the regime without preconditions.

## **Africa**

Aside from the crisis in Darfur, Africa has largely been ignored in foreign policy discussions during the 2008 presidential race. McCain says the US should promote democracy in Africa. He also said the US should support those in Africa “who favour open economies and democratic government against populist demagogues who are dragging their nations back to the failed socialist policies of the past.” Obama has also denounced the violence in Darfur and called for a no-fly zone over the region. He also has spoken regarding US policy toward Zimbabwe, saying that the government of Robert Mugabe is “illegitimate and lacks any credibility.”

**Cuba**

Obama calls for lifting of travel and remittance restrictions on Cuban Americans. He favours a democratic transition in Cuba and has termed Fidel Castro's resignation as “the end of a dark era in Cuba's history”. However, he rules out the possibility of lifting the embargo until the Cuban government takes steps to “democratize the island”.

McCain’s views are very similar. He says the US must provide “material assistance and moral support” to Cubans who oppose the Castro regime. He also said the US embargo should remain in place until those "basic elements of democratic society are met."

**United Nations**

The United Nations relevance is underlined by Obama who has repeatedly said that the organisation should play a key role in managing crises like Darfur. The UN should also play an important role in peace making in Iraq. He says as president he will call on the UN to convene a constitutional convention “which would not adjourn until Iraq’s leaders reach a new accord on reconciliation.”

McCain supports US engagement with the UN but maintains that the oil-for-food scandal and faulty human rights institutions demonstrate a “crying need for reform” in the UN. He, on the other hand, asks for the formation of a “League of Democracies,” an organization for all the world’s democracies that could act “where the UN fails to act, to relieve human suffering in places like Darfur.”

## **Divergence and Convergence of Perceptions on Strategic Issues**

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The United States arguably is the sole superpower in the contemporary international order. As a result, the strategic vision and grand strategy of the US assume tremendous significance. The 2008 Presidential elections will elect a new US president. Mapping the strategic landscape of the Presidential candidates of the two parties may help in discerning the future strategic choice of the country. The paper probes the divergence and convergence of perceptions of the two candidates on strategic issues. It finds the candidates converging on major strategic issues in the process of campaigning.

### **Divergence**

The campaign projected some divergence in the approach to nuclear and arms control issues. Obama did not favour dropping of nuclear weapons on terrorists, but keeping nuclear weapons away from terrorists. However, there was no reference or official statements of McCain arguing that he would drop nuclear weapons on terrorists. Obama also declared that he would not allow the development of new nuclear weapons. McCain's promise of not developing new nuclear weapons was conditional. According to him, if development of new nuclear weapons is indispensable for the viability of American nuclear deterrence, he would support it.<sup>1</sup> However, he promised not to pursue 'Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator'. Although McCain supported America's current moratorium on testing and discussions with American allies to limit testing subject to verification, he however, remained non-committal about the CTBT, promising only to have yet another look at the treaty to 'overcome shortcomings that prevented it from entering into force.'

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<sup>1</sup>johnmccain.com, Press Office, "John McCain on Nuclear Security" , May 27, 2008  
<http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/News/PressReleases/74797d36-8fe4-449a-b760-ccae5e866c99.htm>

On Iran, the Democrats generally favour a non-belligerent approach. Obama and his team articulated their opposition to the Kyl-Lieberman amendment that had suggested the use of US 'military presence in Iraq to counter the threat from Iran'.<sup>2</sup> The Democrats prefer exhausting the non-military option through 'direct presidential diplomacy with Iran without preconditions'. McCain ridiculed the idea of President-level talks. He said that President Clinton had tried it and had failed miserably. According to him, any talk with President Ahmadinejad would only produce 'an earful of anti-Semitic rants, and a worldwide audience for a man who denies one Holocaust and talks before frenzied crowds about starting another.'<sup>3</sup> He felt that "such a spectacle would harm Iranian moderates and dissidents, as the radicals and hardliners strengthen their position and suddenly acquire the appearance of respectability."<sup>4</sup> Thus, on Iran, the battle was between a conciliatory and confrontationist approach, not on any substantial agenda.

Quite naturally, as an Opposition candidate, Obama was critical of George Bush's Policy on Iraq, and wanted a new strategy<sup>5</sup> for the country. The Democratic Party felt that the current war in Iraq is lasting longer than World War I, World War II and the Civil War. Already more than 4,000 soldiers have died. He felt that the prolonged engagement in Iraq had resulted in the decline of resources for Afghanistan. Obama wanted Iraqis to take responsibility at home.<sup>6</sup> One of his campaign pamphlets informed, "Obama will immediately give his military commanders a new mission in Iraq: ending the war. He will immediately begin to remove our combat brigades from Iraq. He will remove troops at a pace of 1 to 2 brigades a month, and have all of our combat brigades out of Iraq within 16 months."<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, McCain supported the current policy in Iraq. He believed that it was "strategically and morally essential for the United States to support the Government

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<sup>2</sup>barackobama.com, "Foreign Policy", [http://origin.barackobama.com/issues/foreign\\_policy/#iran](http://origin.barackobama.com/issues/foreign_policy/#iran)

<sup>3</sup>johnmccain.com, Press Office, "Remarks By John McCain at AIPAC", June 2, 2008  
<http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/News/Speeches/97b08426-d9ad-4046-9c05-1ded14fc0b8a.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> barackobama.com, "Plan for Ending the War in Iraq"  
<http://origin.barackobama.com/issues/iraq/>

<sup>6</sup>barackobama.com, "Remarks of Senator Barack Obama: Town Hall on Energy", August 06, 2008  
[http://www.barackobama.com/2008/08/06/remarks\\_of\\_senator\\_barack\\_obam\\_103.php](http://www.barackobama.com/2008/08/06/remarks_of_senator_barack_obam_103.php)

<sup>7</sup>barackobama.com, "A 21st Century Military for America: Barack Obama on Defence Issues",  
[http://www.barackobama.com/pdf/Defense\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.barackobama.com/pdf/Defense_Fact_Sheet_FINAL.pdf)

of Iraq to become capable of governing itself and safeguarding its people.”<sup>8</sup> He wanted the continuance of American troops till the al Qaeda is defeated and ‘a competent, trained, and capable Iraqi security force is in place and operating effectively.’<sup>9</sup> For McCain, American troops stationed in Iraq could be useful in suppressing ethnic violence in West Asia, too.

Obama believed that the Republican policy of war against terror had in fact increased the mass base of the al Qaeda. He made special mention of mishandling of the Iraqi situation by stating, “It is time to turn the page. When I am President, we will wage the war that has to be won, with a comprehensive strategy with five elements: getting out of Iraq and on to the right battlefield in Afghanistan and Pakistan; developing the capabilities and partnerships we need to take out the terrorists and the world's most deadly weapons; engaging the world to dry up support for terror and extremism; restoring our values; and securing a more resilient homeland.”<sup>10</sup>

George Bush, in his first election campaign, had declared that the US neighbourhood would be one of the strategic priorities of his administration. In this election, though both the candidates refrained from using the phrase ‘the strategic area’ for the American neighbourhood, McCain looked more aggressive in his utterances towards certain Latin American countries like Venezuela. Acknowledging that Venezuela supplied 10 percent of America’s oil needs, he felt that the focus on alternative sources of energy would reduce the American dependence on such a country enriched by American money to undertake anti-American activities. For the purpose, he talked about creating an alternative energy security approach by embracing non-conventional energy like solar power and wind power on the one hand, and nuclear power on the other. He discussed setting up at least 45 nuclear power stations.<sup>11</sup> Obama did not appear so aggressive towards the Latin American countries during his election campaign.

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<sup>8</sup>johnmccain.com, “Strategy for Victory in Iraq”,  
<http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/Issues/fdeb03a7-30b0-4ece-8e34-4c7ea83f11d8.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup>barackobama.com, “Remarks of Senator Obama: The War We Need to Win”, August 01, 2007  
[http://www.barackobama.com/2007/08/01/remarks\\_of\\_senator\\_obama\\_the\\_w\\_1.php](http://www.barackobama.com/2007/08/01/remarks_of_senator_obama_the_w_1.php)

<sup>11</sup>johnmccain.com, “Remarks by John McCain at his Ohio Town Hall Meeting”, July 9, 2008  
<http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/News/Speeches/1e04960e-141f-4cb2-9c99-133f7c179a62.htm>

## Convergence

Despite financial problems, both the candidates appeared ready to modernize US armed forces to undertake global responsibilities and challenges. McCain believed, “In a dangerous world, protecting America's national security requires a strong military. Today, America has the most capable, best-trained and best-led military force in the world. But much needs to be done to maintain our military leadership, retain our technological advantage, and ensure that America has a modern, agile military force able to meet the diverse security challenges of the 21st century.”<sup>12</sup> The Obama campaign literature inscribed similar language. It noted, “For all the ‘transformation,’ our budgeting for military hardware remains focused on weapons systems that deal with threats from the past, inadequately addressing current needs and the changing security environment. Even worse, many of these multi-billion systems will not be available for decades, when our troops need support today.”<sup>13</sup> It promised that “An Obama administration will fully equip our troops for the missions they face...review weapons programs...”<sup>14</sup> Both leaders emerged as great supporters of the development, deployment and raising the effectiveness of theater and national missile defences to defend continental America from missiles and nuclear weapons attacks and blackmail.

President Bush has been criticized for pursuing unilateral US policy, and ignoring friends and allies on crucial international and strategic issues. It is an altogether different matter that in principle or formally, even President Bush reiterated his commitment to work with friends and allies. During the current Presidential election, both the candidates vowed to build transatlantic alliances so that the US worked with them in different missions, especially Afghanistan and counter-terrorism. Both also emphasized the need for helping friends, allies and partners when they need the US.

McCain opined, “Increased cooperation between the United States and its allies in the concerted use of military, diplomatic, and economic power and reforms in the intelligence capabilities of the United States has disrupted terrorist networks and exposed

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<sup>12</sup>johnmccain.com, “National Security: A Strong Military in a Dangerous World”  
<http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/Issues/054184f4-6b51-40dd-8964-54fcf66a1e68.htm>

<sup>13</sup>Note 7 A 21st Century Military for America

<sup>14</sup>Ibid

plots around the world. There still has not been a major terrorist attack in the United States since September 11, 2001. The United States did not single-handedly win the Cold War; the transatlantic alliance did, in concert with partners around the world. The bonds we share with Europe in terms of history, values, and interests are unique. Americans should welcome the rise of a strong, confident European Union as we continue to support a strong NATO. The future of the transatlantic relationship lies in confronting the challenges of the twenty-first century worldwide: developing a common energy policy, creating a transatlantic common market tying our economies more closely together, addressing the dangers posed by a revanchist Russia...”<sup>15</sup> (footnote?) Obama expectedly favoured ‘strong partnership with our European allies’, ‘a strong NATO that brings peace and security to Europe and helps the United States meet security challenges around the world’ and treatment of allies with respect, repairing America’s declined moral authority, and recreating a mutually beneficial partnership with valuable partners.

Both the candidates issued a joint statement for commemorating the 9/11 victims thus signaling that they are against such incidents and are determined to fight against terrorism. Quite significantly, Obama appeared closer to the Republican approach on fighting terrorism and at times chastised George Bush for ignoring warning signals about terrorist attacks. Both the candidates are going to support an increased military involvement in Afghanistan.

The candidates from both the formations felt the American troops would be ultimately withdrawn. Notwithstanding Obama’s criticism of Bush strategy in Iraq, neither of the candidates talked about a strategy of a rigid timetable for withdrawals in Iraq. McCain in his speeches condemned Obama for talking to disengage the US troops from Iraq. However, Obama also talked at a number of places about a prolonged engagement in Iraq. In a joint statement with his vice-presidential running mate Joseph Biden, he remarked, “Ending the war in Iraq will be the beginning, but not the end, of addressing

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<sup>15</sup>johnmccain.com, “Remarks By John McCain To The Los Angeles World Affairs Council,” March 26, 2008, <http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/News/Speeches/872473dd-9ccb-4ab4-9d0d-ec54f0e7a497.htm>



our defense challenges.”<sup>16</sup> He said, “We didn't have a difference on whether or not we were going to be funding troops.” (footnote)<sup>17</sup> But Obama wanted a phased and responsible withdrawal from Iraq. Quite interestingly, the Democrats on their website announced that after their substantial withdrawal of troops from Iraq, “Under the Obama-Biden plan, a residual force will remain in Iraq and in the region to conduct targeted counter-terrorism missions against al Qaeda in Iraq and to protect American diplomatic and civilian personnel. They will not build permanent bases in Iraq, but will continue efforts to train and support the Iraqi security forces as long as Iraqi leaders move toward political reconciliation and away from sectarianism.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, like McCain, Obama and his colleague also favour continuing of American troops, albeit small in number, in Iraq.

Both the Presidential candidates supported the idea of nuclear disarmament. However, both did not indicate any roadmap for it. Obama talked about continuing a strong deterrent as long as nuclear weapons continue in the world. Similarly, McCain also talked about a safe and reliable nuclear deterrent. He talked about fewer nuclear weapons for a safer world. Thus, they just talked about arms control, some reduction in the size of the arsenals, denuclearizing nuclear arsenals towards each other and most importantly about the strengthening of the non-proliferation regime.

Both talked about strengthening of the NPT, detecting and stopping the smuggling of weapons of mass destruction throughout the world, countering nuclear terrorism that includes securing loose nuclear materials from terrorists. Obama and Biden pledged to strengthen nuclear proliferation essentially by focusing on issues confronting the NPT so that countries like North Korea and Iran, after breaking the rules, would automatically face strong international sanctions.

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<sup>16</sup> barackobama.com, “Barack Obama and Joe Biden on Defence Issues”  
[http://www.barackobama.com/pdf/issues/Fact\\_Sheet\\_Defense\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.barackobama.com/pdf/issues/Fact_Sheet_Defense_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> [cnnpolitics.com](http://edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/09/26/debate.mississippi.transcript/), Election Center, “Transcript of first presidential debate”, October 14, 2008  
<http://edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/09/26/debate.mississippi.transcript/>

<sup>18</sup> Note 5 Plan for Ending the War in Iraq

On Asia, too, both the candidates seemed to be adopting similar postures. Both appreciated the economic achievements and increasing democratization of the continent. Both demonstrated their willingness to work with Asia. During the campaign, in East Asia, the focus remained on North Korea. The NPT framework was the model available for North Korea to solve the nuclear riddle. Japan and South Korea were mentioned as important partners in the region.

McCain, in his speeches, called China and Russia strategic competitors. However, he also favoured nuclear dialogue with China to promote transparency and cooperation on nuclear force structure and doctrine. He said “China and the United States are not destined to be adversaries. We have numerous overlapping interests and hope to see our relationship evolve in a manner that benefits both countries and, in turn, the Asia-Pacific region and the world. But until China moves toward political liberalization, our relationship will be based on periodically shared interests rather than the bedrock of shared values.”<sup>19</sup> According to McCain, “Dealing with a rising China will be a central challenge for the next American president. Recent prosperity in China has brought more people out of poverty faster than during any other time in human history. China's new found power implies responsibilities. China could bolster its claim that it is ‘peacefully rising’ by being more transparent about its significant military build-up, by working with the world to isolate pariah states such as Burma, Sudan and Zimbabwe, and by ceasing its efforts to establish regional forums and economic arrangements designed to exclude America from Asia.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the Obama group articulated, “...China’s rise may pose one of the most important foreign policy challenges to the U.S. in coming years.”<sup>21</sup> However, it refused to ‘demonize China’ because of the relevance of a developing China for ‘a constructive relationship to foster continued peace and prosperity’. However, like the Republicans, Obama struck a cautionary note on China’s military modernization.

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<sup>19</sup> Note 15 Remarks by John McCain

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> barackobama.com, “Barack Obama and Joe Biden: Protecting U.S. Interests and Advancing American Values in Our Relationship with China”, <http://www.barackobama.com/pdf/FactSheetChina.pdf>

On Russia, interestingly, both the leaders had quite similar postures. Both, in their speeches, talked tough about the Russian military action in Georgia. But both realised that Russia is not the Soviet Union, so the Cold War strategy would not be suitable to deal with a Resurgent Russia. Both talked about a new comprehensive strategy to engage Russia. More interestingly, McCain in his famous Denver speech, even talked about deeply engaging Russia on arms control. It is perceived as a big departure from the policy of George Bush. McCain promised to work with US allies and Russia to at least reduce and, if possible, abolish deploy tactical nuclear weapons in Europe. Both the candidates favoured expanding the mandate of the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. Obama talked about setting 'a goal to expand the US-Russian ban on intermediate- range missiles so that the agreement is global.' McCain also promised to 'seriously consider Russia's recent proposal to work together to globalize' the treaty. McCain was hopeful of including verification measures based on those currently in effect under the START Agreement. He even wanted to build Russian confidence in the American missile defence programme.

## **Conclusion**

The election campaigns of the two parties have to start on two different platforms to demonstrate their uniqueness on a range of issues. However, the rigor of the American political process often forces the candidates to cut down their rhetoric and look for reasonable and practical groundings of their policy pronouncements. This pragmatism forces convergence of the perceptions on candidates on general policy issues, more so, on strategic matters. Strong determinants continue to shape the final outcome as well as pronouncements. During this election campaign, too, the candidates worked hard to illuminate their differences on particular strategic issues, but finally both appeared converging on dominant themes and the differences are not very substantial.

## **Transatlantic Relations beyond the US Elections**

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The presidential election in the US is going to take place at a crucial juncture when the transatlantic partners, linked by numerous umbilical ties, are facing an economic crunch. Much has already been written about the case of Iceland, which, though not a member of the European Union (EU), has experienced the worst economic crisis since its existence. But major European economies and the drivers of the EU integration have also been seriously pondering over the economic health of the Union. It appears now that the economy would overshadow all other issues – domestic and international - in the final leg of the US elections. Therefore, foreign policy issues would take a backseat. However with Europe, the economic ties would eventually become the most crucial one.

As usual, Europe has been observing the US elections with interest. Similarly both the presidential candidates placed European capitals on their itinerary as part of their election campaigns. In fact, Senator Barack Obama's emotive speech in Berlin was well received, not only by the German media but also by the European press in general. Senator John McCain's visit to Europe also evoked the same enthusiasm. Though some influential European thinkers and a section of the media are in favour of Senator Obama taking over the reins of the White House, the European hope, the reasons behind and any influence on the ultimate outcome may briefly be analysed here.

Seen in retrospect, the 2004 US election was marked by rhetoric and sarcasm from both sides of the Atlantic. Issues like the Iraq War and the subsequent 'Coalition of the Willing' had sharply divided the EU in 2003. Some analysts had already predicted the demise of the transatlantic relations. European leaders, mainly the former French President, Jacques Chirac, and the German Chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, had been in the forefront of stalling unilateral action against Iraq, thereby inviting American comments like 'Old Europe' or ridiculing a meeting of selective West European leaders, including

Germany and France, as a ‘summit of chocolate makers’ etc. The transatlantic differences even resulted in verbal acrimony in multilateral fora where both the US and European leaders had been present.

The bitterness started fading away with the second Bush presidency as well as the arrival of new leaders on the European stage, like Chancellor Angela Merkel in Germany, Gordon Brown in the UK and President, Nicolas Sarkozy in France, whom the European press termed as *Sarkozy l’Americain*. The new British government under Gordon Brown has consciously attempted to distance itself from the earlier war rhetoric during the prime ministership of Tony Blair, as well as undertaken a mid-term course correction in its ongoing Counter-Terrorism strategy. Chancellor Merkel and President Sarkozy have also been earnestly attempting to rebuild the transatlantic relationship that had been severely damaged during their predecessors’ terms. A more Atlanticist leadership in Europe has therefore been able to readjust the transatlantic relationship and this time, the atmosphere in Europe is significantly more congenial for both the candidates than the 2004 US elections.

Apart from the new political leaders in Europe, there have been issues and developments - European and global – between the two elections, which necessitated the transatlantic rapprochement. Though the US has not faced any repetition of 9/11, the terrorist attacks in Madrid on March 11, 2004, underground bombings on July 7, 2005 in London and the unearthing of potential terror plots, sleeper cells and arrests of amateur terrorists throughout Western Europe have not only been issues of imminent concern for the Europeans but for the US as well. The radicalisation of a restive part of the younger Muslims in Europe and their terror connections with different global hotspots like Pakistan, Iraq and Afghanistan, has been a very discomfoting trend for European security. Though the Muslim community in the US is smaller than its European counterpart and the radicalisation is not as visible as in Europe, the close relations between the two continents have made the challenge more difficult, both for European and American policymakers. It is also true that there is a noticeable difference between the American and European approaches in countering terrorism and issues like

Guantanamo Bay, renditions, secret prisons in some EU member countries, aerial bombings etc., have remained contentious. However, closer transatlantic Counter-Terrorism cooperation – at the level of the EU and at the bilateral level – given the human rights standards in the EU, will remain one of the cornerstones of transatlantic relations after the elections in the US.

Likewise, the issue of the common transatlantic security architecture and the future the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) would remain another pillar of transatlantic relationship. After Sarkozy took over as the French President, the French White Paper on Defence and National Security highlighted that France would join in all NATO command structures which France had left during De Gaulle's time. A resurgent Russia and the Russia-Georgia conflict have not only posed serious questions for the EU enlargement process but for the NATO in Europe also. An increasing European pessimism about the NATO operations in Afghanistan would continue to be in the transatlantic agenda in the coming months.

Last, but not least, the current economic crisis in the US with its global consequences would be a major transatlantic issue. An interesting development worth observing is that President Sarkozy is gaining a European stature while attempting to face the economic challenge. Not only is France at present holding the Council of the EU, but as Germany is already in election mode, domestic and party affairs would make Chancellor Merkel more busy at home. The rise of Sarkozy as a European leader, who will deal not only with the US but address other global issues, will have to be watched. In comparing the situation in 2004 and now, as *The Economist* succinctly put it,: “It is hard to recall that only a few years ago, France's voice went unheard not only in Washington but also in Europe..... Yet today Mr Sarkozy has put France — and Europe — back on the diplomatic map.”

It is also pertinent here to analyse the foreign policy priorities of both the rivals and whether Europe really does have an important position therein. In comparison with Senator McCain, the foreign policy priorities of Senator Obama seem to be more

articulate. The strategic partnership with Europe, as envisaged by the Obama-Biden team, is a comprehensive one, including some major issues like Afghanistan, climate change, missile defence, Counter-Terrorism, Iran etc. Some other and long-pending issues like Northern Ireland, Cyprus and Turkey may look ambitious at present and if elected, Senator Obama would not be able to give them the attention due to other immediate issues. The congruence is noticeable in the arena of counter-terrorism where both Senators Obama and McCain have declared that the Guantanamo Bay prison would be closed. The issue of Guantanamo has remained a thorny issue in the transatlantic relationship as Gilles de Kerchove, the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, has recently expressed his reservations about the ongoing American war rhetoric on terrorism and informed that Europe might help the US close down these prisons. It seems that though both the candidates visited Europe during their election campaigns, barring Iraq and Afghanistan, US foreign policy is not going to be a major deciding factor in the elections, not even on the transatlantic relationship. As the Europeans have continuously been pointing out, for the US, Europe is no longer the priority it was during the Cold War. Moreover, the US has shifted its focus to Asia and the growing economies like India and China. However, recent developments suggest that immediately after the elections, the US has to work closely with Europe on various issues which would make the European partners feel important again.

It is also intriguing as to why Europe prefers Senator Obama over McCain. A survey conducted by Transatlantic Trends 2008 published in mid-September, illustrates that almost half of the Europeans think that the transatlantic relationship would improve if Senator Obama becomes the next US President. Though the survey is an indicative one and not exhaustive or comprehensive as it has covered only 11 members of the 27 EU members and did not include the countries from the Baltics and the Scandinavia, it may be interpreted that in general, Europeans consider the US elections as an opportunity to re-strengthen the transatlantic relationship. Though the Europeans have distinguished between the US and the years of the first presidency of George Bush, they might still consider the McCain presidency to be a continuation of the Bush presidencies. The French philosopher, Bernard-Henri Lévy, who has openly supported Senator Obama as

the new president, opines that Senator Obama's election would be some kind of a revolution and Senator McCain would make America inward-looking. In other words, in Senator Obama, European opinion-makers see the American success story of multiculturalism, integration or assimilation, topics which have been fiercely debated in Europe with regard to its own religious and ethnic minority communities. In conclusion, it might be reiterated that though the ultimate outcome of the US elections would be based on domestic issues, given the recent developments, the transatlantic relationship will have to be revisited and revitalised by both the partners beyond the elections. It would not be unexpected if the transatlantic dialogue becomes more intense after the elections, irrespective of a McCain or Obama presidency.



## **US Presidential candidates-2008 and their Policy Projections on Pakistan**

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Researcher

### **Barack Obama On Pakistan**

In August 2007, Barack Obama delivered a significant speech in Washington admitting that the United States has to target resurgent Al Qaeda outfits within Pakistan's NWFP. Obama went to the extent of saying that if elected, he would not hesitate to conduct operations within the territory of Pakistan even if Pakistan is opposed to it. This was a landmark statement by Senator Obama and sought to redress the accusations from the rival camps which initially pronounced Obama's approach towards foreign policy issues as 'naïve.' Obama reasserted his foreign policy credentials as his forte and a subject of prime interest. The statement however came at a time when Obama was trailing behind his arch rival senator Hillary Clinton in the popularity charts. Nonetheless, it had significant connotations regarding Obama's policy approach on these issues. Obama sought to make the US military aid to Pakistan subject to Pakistan's initiatives in curbing the mushrooming growth of militants training camps and Taliban presence within its territory. "If we have actionable intelligence about high value terrorist targets and President Musharraf won't act, we will," Obama asserted. He had the chance to visit Pakistan in 1981 as a college student and he claimed to have knowledge about Shia-Sunni sects much before he joined the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Senator Obama, while admitting that Kashmir is a "constant instigator" of conflict between India and Pakistan, stated clearly, "Historically, Pakistan has tolerated or in some cases funded the mujahideen." The statement was of far reaching significance as it partially endorsed what India has been accusing Pakistan of. Obama did not stop here and called for US action against Pakistan's act of funding the militant groups in India and Afghanistan. Obama is of the opinion that the problems prevailing in South Asia are

somewhat intertwined and need a comprehensive approach. In this case, if the restoration of overall peace in the region requires the US to play some role in the India-Pakistan peace talks, it may well engage in such exercise. Obama has time and again reiterated on a dire need to close the operating terrorist camps in Pakistan. “It’s just not in the interest of Afghan security, or US security, it is in the interest of Pakistan security that we shut down those bases.” He termed Pakistan’s association with the Mujahideens as ‘counterproductive.’

Obama strongly disfavoured the mishandling of American aid by Pakistan for supporting terrorism in the Kashmir valley. The aid which was meant to fund the ongoing ‘war on terror’, he stated, was misappropriated and used for encouraging terror activities against its neighbour, India. “We are providing them military aid without having enough strings attached. So they’re using the military aid that we use – they’re not, to Pakistan, they’re preparing for a war against India.” His displeasure was evident in one of the speeches in July 2008 wherein he said, “Not enough of it has been in the form of building schools and building infrastructure in the country to help develop and give opportunity to the Pakistani people.” A similar statement from Obama came in the wake of a Senate bill which was considering an annual aid worth \$1.5 billion in September 2008 for social development in Pakistan. Interestingly, the bill was introduced by his running mate Joseph Biden. Obama thereafter suggested some amount of austerity in the procedure of granting aid to Pakistan so that it was channelised towards security operations against militants within its territory and not for destructive efforts to destabilize India by sponsoring terrorists operating in Kashmir.

Even though Obama propagated military action against terrorist strongholds in Pakistan, he was wise enough to give a statement in congruence with the conventional US policy that a full fledged invasion of Pakistan by US is not likely in the near future. Nevertheless, he advocated a US policy that “compels Pakistani action against terrorists who threaten our common security and are using the FATA and the northwest territories of Pakistan as a safe haven.”

Senator Obama welcomed the election of Asif Ali Zardari as the civilian President of Pakistan in the September 2008 presidential elections. He was hopeful that Zardari, as the democratically elected President, would fill the void created by prolonged periods of military rule in the country. He also expressed satisfaction at the reinstatement of the deposed judges and termed it as “an important step towards the restoration of a truly independent judiciary.” Notably, Obama was one of the initiators of a resolution condemning the act of imposition of emergency by former President Musharraf in November 2007. He also called for investigating the assassination attempts on former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto at the same time. This was much before Bhutto was actually assassinated on December 27, 2007 during one of her electoral campaigns.

### **John McCain on Pakistan**

John McCain believes in retaining cooperation with Pakistan, a trusted ally of the United States over the years. Nonetheless, he propagates using this sense of cooperation between the two states to “dismantle the cells and camps that the Taliban and al Qaeda maintain in his country.” He cautioned, “Talibanization of Pakistani society is advancing,” and to counter the menace, he said that the US ought to pursue “a long term commitment to the country.” The commitment in this regard would involve strengthening Pakistan’s capabilities to eradicate breeding grounds for insurgency/militancy within its territory. McCain stands for proper utilization of the flow of US economic aid to Pakistan for betterment of the basic infrastructure leading to socio-economic development, though he was not very coherent about how his country would ensure this.

In September 2008, McCain did not support the view which was making the rounds that the US should consider curtailing economic aid to Pakistan. Obviously, he could not adhere to his opponent’s (Obama) views which called for a similar move. McCain strongly opposed US military action on the soil of Pakistan. Nevertheless, he called for a constructive dialogue between India and Pakistan in which the US has a role to play. He said that the possibility of a nuclear confrontation in the Indian subcontinent could be

minimized and such maneuvers could “construct a secure global nuclear order that eliminates the likelihood of proliferation and the possibility of nuclear conflict.”

McCain was particularly concerned about the state of affairs in Pakistan after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. He intended to discuss the situation with the National Security Council “to maintain order, or restore order, whichever is the case in Pakistan.” Significantly, at the same time, McCain expressed his conviction in the then President Musharraf in that hour of crisis calling him a ‘reliable ally’ of the United States. He even went to the extent of saying that “prior to Musharraf, Pakistan was a failed state,” they had corrupt governments and they would rotate back and forth and there was corruption, and Musharraf basically restored order. So you are going to hear a lot of criticism about Musharraf that he hasn’t done everything we wanted him to do, but he did agree to step down as head of the military and he did get the elections.” If elected to the office of President, McCain said he would ensure the safety of the nuclear stockpiles in Pakistan and that they do not fall prey to militants operating there. McCain strongly supported the February 2008 elections in Pakistan and at that point intended to provide Musharraf every possible support to restore democracy in Pakistan.

Just about a month before McCain made favourable remarks about Musharraf, he vehemently criticized Musharraf on the issue of imposition of emergency in Pakistan in November 2007. He affirmed, “I think president Musharraf has made a mistake,” and urged that the people of the United States must make “as much effort as we can to convince President Musharraf that he needs to back off on this and that we need to have restoration of law and order in the country and constitutional government.” McCain had also drawn a parallel between the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the emergence of a radical Islamic state in Pakistan, and stated, “it would be very difficult for us to keep weapons from spreading in the region, from Afghanistan coming under enormous pressures, and make our challenges there very difficult.”

### **Concluding remarks**

After studying the standpoints of Senator Barack Obama and Senator John McCain with regard to foreign policy towards Pakistan, one gets a sense that there are no fundamental differences in their basic approaches. Both have primarily criticized the absence of democracy in Pakistan during 1999-2008 and thereafter eventually supported the elections. They strongly support the fact that militants in Pakistan could be menace to the security concerns in the entire region but are against direct US military action in Pakistan for the purpose. On the issue of misuse of US aid by Pakistan for funding terrorists against India, Obama sounded distinctly harsh on Pakistan, but his rival McCain chose to maintain silence on the issue. Their respective approaches are fairly balanced and in line with the basic traits of US foreign policy towards Pakistan.

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## **Energy Dependence, Climate Change and US Presidential Elections: Shared Concerns, Varied Solutions**

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Concerns generated by energy dependence and climate change have cornered a fair share of attention in the current US presidential campaign, apart from the worries caused by the domestic economic downturn, the prosecution of the unending wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the broader fight against terrorism. Rising oil prices, which galloped beyond the \$100 a barrel mark in the recent past, brought to stark attention the massive dependence of the world's biggest consumer of energy on resources from politically unstable regions like the Middle East. The following paragraphs briefly place the positions of the leading candidates on the issue – primarily the Republican and Democratic contenders, their understanding of the causes of the dependence and their respective prescriptions to address the problem.

### **Overcoming America's Energy Dependence**

Both the Democratic and Republican candidates, Senator Barack Obama and Senator John McCain, have stated that implementation of measures to reduce America's addiction to foreign oil would be high on their agenda if elected. Sen. McCain, for instance, writing in *Foreign Affairs*, has argued that “the transfer of American wealth to the Middle East through continued oil purchases helps sustain the conditions under which extremism breeds, and ... spurs global warming, a gathering danger to our planet.”<sup>22</sup>

Obama, on his part, has called for increasing the quantum of energy generated from renewable sources (with over a quarter of America's energy to come from these sources by 2025), increased use of electric/hybrid cars (1 million of these vehicles to be on the

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<sup>22</sup> John McCain, “An Enduring Peace Built on Freedom Securing America's Future,” *Foreign Affairs*, November-December 2007, at <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20071101faessay86602/john-mccain/an-enduring-peace-built-on-freedom.html?mode=print>

road by 2015), release of oil from the US strategic petroleum reserves to dampen the effect of high international oil prices, increased energy efficiency to reduce electricity demand by over 15 percent by 2020 and developing clean coal technologies, among other measures.<sup>23</sup>

Obama and his vice-presidential candidate Joseph Biden, in their comprehensive energy plan, 'New Energy for America' have called on oil companies to provide Emergency Energy Rebates (amounting to \$500 for an individual and \$1000 for married couples) to help offset the increase in gas prices. They have also vowed to crackdown on oil speculation by plugging loopholes in Commodity Futures Trading Commission regulations.

### ***Nuclear Power: Pros and Cons***

Senator Obama has, however, been cautious in endorsing the use of nuclear power to mitigate energy concerns, despite the fact that the state that he represents in the US Senate, Illinois, has the maximum number of nuclear power reactors in the country.<sup>24</sup> Obama has highlighted the problems of nuclear waste and other environmental and safety concerns related to nuclear energy, including the issue of proliferation. He has also expressed reservations about the viability of storing the country's entire nuclear waste at the Department of Energy's proposed underground storage facility at Yucca Mountain, Nevada.

Senator McCain, on the other hand, is a vigorous supporter of nuclear power, and has stated that it is "one of the cleanest, safest and most reliable energy sources on Earth."<sup>25</sup> He has called for the establishment of 45 new nuclear power plants by 2030 and of eventually constructing 100 new plants. The Senator from Arizona is in favour of storing nuclear waste at the Yucca Mountain repository as well as the construction of new such

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<sup>23</sup> Barack Obama and Joseph Biden, "New Energy for America," at [http://www.barackobama.com/pdf/factsheet\\_energy\\_speech\\_080308.pdf](http://www.barackobama.com/pdf/factsheet_energy_speech_080308.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Out of the 104 operating nuclear power reactors, 11 reactors at 6 nuclear plants were in Illinois. Reports also note that the Senator has received campaign contributions worth nearly \$200,000 from representatives of the nuclear power company, Exelon.

<sup>25</sup> See David Kestenbaum, "Nuclear Power: A Thorny Issue for Candidates," July 21, 2008, at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=92690120>



sites. He has also advocated the reprocessing of spent fuel in order to deal with the issue of nuclear waste.<sup>26</sup> Sen. McCain has also stated that these 45 new nuclear plants would create over 700,000 new jobs over the next two decades and that his experience in serving on nuclear-powered aircraft carriers as a Navy pilot had convinced him about the safety of nuclear power.<sup>27</sup>

### ***To Drill or Not To Drill***

While both candidates agree on the need to deploy new technologies to make better use of domestic sources of energy, they differ on the question of drilling for oil at new offshore locations. McCain has called for an aggressive policy of initiating drilling projects at new offshore locations, including in regions like the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), a position opposed by environmentalists as well as by Obama, who favours limited outer continental shelf drilling. Though Obama acknowledges that more drilling would help in meeting rising demand at a later date, he contends drilling would not help in reducing oil prices in the short-term and that the US “cannot drill our way to energy security.”<sup>28</sup>

### ***A ‘Green’ Economy and the ‘Lexington Project’***

Towards the development of renewable energy, Sen. Obama intends to invest \$150 billion over the next decade and envisages doubling the amount of federal research and development funds towards this end. These investments, according to the Obama camp, would create over 5 million ‘green jobs’ within the country. As the Senator representing the corn-growing state of Illinois, Obama is also a strong proponent of the use of bio-

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<sup>26</sup> See “US Elections: Candidates on Climate,” *Nature*, September 24, 2008, at <http://www.nature.com/climate/2008/0810/full/climate.2008.100.html>

<sup>27</sup> Mary Ann Giordano and Larry Rohter, “McCain at Nuclear Plant Highlights Energy Issue,” *The New York Times*, August 6, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/06/us/politics/06nuke.html?ref=todayspaper>

<sup>28</sup> Michelle Austein, “With Gas Prices Rising, Candidates Consider Energy Alternatives,” August 6, 2008, at <http://www.america.gov/st/elections08-english/2008/August/20080806154540hmnietua0.3147699.html>; Christopher Joyce, “Candidates Clash On Impact Of Offshore Drilling,” July 16, 2008, at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=92570077>

fuels like ethanol. He has called for a rapid rise in the use of bio-fuels, amounting to 36 billion gallons by 2022 and 60 billion gallons by 2030.<sup>29</sup>

Sen. McCain, on his part, seeks to pump in \$2 billion annually to develop clean coal technologies, as part of what he terms the 'Lexington Project' to secure America's energy independence. Among other incentives, Sen. McCain proposes to institute a \$300 million prize for a battery-powered electric car and a \$5,000 tax credit for consumers purchasing zero-emissions vehicle.

### **Climate Change: Cap-and-Trade, Renewed International Efforts**

The candidates' proposals at generating clean and alternative sources of energy are as much an effort to overcome America's energy dependence as to deal more effectively with the concerns of climate change. For both the candidates, climate change is not just an "urgent challenge" facing America, but in the words of Obama, "an epochal, man-made threat to the planet."<sup>30</sup> Obama and Biden envisage making the United States a leader in tackling the issue, by re-engaging with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). They also propose a Global Energy Forum, involving the G-8, as well as China, India, Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa, to discuss global energy and environmental issues.<sup>31</sup>

More specifically, the Obama-Biden plan envisions implementing a cap-and-trade system to reduce carbon emissions to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.<sup>32</sup> Under the system, the government would set a ceiling on carbon-dioxide emissions and companies would be allowed to participate in an auction to bid for permits to emit greenhouse gases (GHG). Those companies which can cap their emissions below their targets will be allowed to sell off their extra carbon credits, thus making it profitable for them to go green. Obama

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<sup>29</sup> "Obama on the Issues," at [http://www.grist.org/feature/2007/07/30/obama\\_factsheet/index.html](http://www.grist.org/feature/2007/07/30/obama_factsheet/index.html)

<sup>30</sup> Barack Obama, "Renewing American Leadership," *Foreign Affairs*, July-August 2007, at <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20070701faessay86401-p40%20/barack-obama/renewing-american-leadership.html>

<sup>31</sup> Cheryll Pellerin, "Obama Answers Science Questions Posed to Presidential Candidates," September 2, 2008, at <http://www.america.gov/st/elections08-english/2008/September/200809021830211cnirellep0.4660456.html>

<sup>32</sup> See Obama and Biden, "New Energy for America"

intends to finance his clean energy development goals, pegged at \$150 billion over a decade, through the auctioning of carbon credits. The Illinois Senator also foresees America cashing in on its expertise so developed in clean energy in the low-carbon energy market estimated to be worth over \$500 billion by 2050.

Sen. McCain also supports a market-based cap-and-trade system to reduce emissions to 60 percent below 1990 levels by 2050. His plan, however, would see the government allotting carbon credits to companies who continue to pollute, as opposed to the allotment of carbon credits through auction as envisaged in the Obama-Biden proposal. Calling for renewed international efforts to tackle the problem of climate change, McCain envisages required participation by China and India in a post-Kyoto framework.<sup>33</sup> McCain supports the non-ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, which came into force in 2005, by the United States, as the treaty did not require major developing nations to comply with emissions reduction targets.

### **Conclusion**

While the shared concerns on the issues of climate change and energy dependence as well as the creative solutions proposed have to be welcomed, it remains to be seen if the winning candidate can muster enough political courage to implement his plans. The rest of the world will be watching with interest the unfolding political developments in the world's biggest consumer of energy as well as the second biggest emitter of GHG.

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<sup>33</sup> For Sen. McCain's proposals on tackling climate change, see <http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/Issues/da151a1c-733a-4dc1-9cd3-f9ca5caba1de.htm>

**Indian Americans: Making a Mark on the US Political Firmament**

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Even as the US presidential election lives upto its billing of being the greatest show on earth, it also provides an opportunity to make a realistic assessment of the onward march of the Indian American community in the political arena in that country. Since the late 1990s, each successive phase of elections in the United States has seen the Indian American community go from strength to strength, not just in their potential to impact the elections through political donations but also through their active participation in the electoral process. The community has been welcomed by the political establishment in both mainstream parties since the coming to age of yet another ethnic minority and its active participation in the political process serves as a reaffirmation ingrained in the American psyche of being a land of immigrants.

The current Presidential election has seen unprecedented involvement by the Indian American community, not only in terms of backing specific candidates, but also in the political mobilization of the community. This was in keeping with the unique nature of these elections, beginning with the Democratic primaries which, for the first time seemed to hold a good chance for either a woman or a person of colour to become President. The woman in question, Hillary Clinton, had long been a favourite of the Indian American community and community activists and moneybags pulled out all the stops when it came to bankrolling her candidacy. Groups such as Indian Americans for Hillary 2008 (IAFH) led by hotelier Sant Singh Chatwal pledged to raise \$5 million for Clinton. So much so that the Obama campaign caustically referred to her as the “Senator (D-Punjab).” Even though Obama subsequently apologized for the slur, he was himself not lacking in support from the Indian American community, particularly from second generation Indian Americans on college campuses across the land. An example of this was South Asians for Obama (SAFO), a grassroots organization founded by students that held its first fundraising event in March 2006. By October 2008, according to the Obama

website, SAFO's 507 members had hosted over a thousand events, made 16,000 phone calls and raised over \$270,000..

Indian Americans, like other minority communities, have traditionally backed the Democrats and this election is no different; the 2008 National Asian American Survey (NAAS) reports that, "53 percent of Asian Indians are voting for Obama, 13 percent are voting for McCain and 33 percent of Asian Indians are still undecided." On a broader scale, the survey found that "39 percent of Asian Indians identify themselves as Democrats, 7 percent as Republican, 19 percent identify as independents, and 35 percent identify as non-partisan voters."

What Indian American backers of the Republican Party lack in numbers, they make up in wealth, being largely businessmen and medical professionals who came to the United States in the sixties and are fundamentally in tune with the Republican party's philosophies of low taxes, minimal regulations and free markets. A prime example is Dr. Zach Zachariah, a cardiologist from Florida, who is reputed to have raised as much as \$19 million over the years to finance various Republican campaigns. Zachariah is reported to have said that almost a fifth of his funds have been raised from like-minded Indian Americans. Individuals like Dr.Zachariah are known as "bundlers" and their utility lies in their ability to mobilize funds for candidates by hosting fundraisers. According to a newspaper report in January, in the current election cycle, Barack Obama had six Indian American bundlers out of a total of 322, while John McCain had one among his 442 bundlers. Of those who fell by the wayside during the primaries, Hillary Clinton had 10/322, and John Edwards had 2/665. In this regard, it is evident that the Indian Diaspora is a classic example of John Armstrong's definition of a mobilized, as opposed to a proletarian, diaspora. Proleterian diasporas have no economic resources, few communicational skills and limited organizational capabilities. They are incapable of articulating their group interests and have no access to decision-making circles. In contrast, mobilized diasporas bring occupational skills that are in short supply in their adopted country. Because these skills are valuable to the dominant native elites, they enjoy the material rewards and social status that their professions command, and gain quick access to the native elites.

The Indian American community first made its presence felt through cheque-book politics where wealthy members of the community forked out large amounts of cash to political parties and candidates. Though this is a common feature in US politics, what was uncommon about the Indian American version was that, by and large, there was no quid pro quo involved, other than a desire to rub shoulders with the high and mighty, and photo-ops to preserve the moment. As their numbers increased, Indian Americans went on to form groups and organizations such as the Indian American Forum for Political Education (IAFPE), and the Indian American Centre for Political Awareness (IACPA) which strove to increase awareness of the system as well as to champion the interests of the Indian Americans. As evident from their names, these groups were chary of getting directly into the political process and had only a limited ambition of educating the voter. However, as Indian Americans began to test the political waters themselves, other organizations such as the Indian American Leadership Initiative (IALI) and the US India Political Action Committee (USINPAC) sprang up, both to support such candidates and to provide a common and united platform from which the Indian American community could reach out to the politicians.

Barring the lone exception of Bobby Jindal, who was elected to the US House of Representatives in 2004, other Indian Americans have been successful only in elections to State Legislatures. Rising stars in the State Legislatures include Minnesota state Senator Satveer Chaudhary, Maryland House Majority Leader Kumar Barve, Iowa state legislators Swati Dandekar and Jay Goyal, New Jersey state legislator Upendra Chivukula and Rajiv Goyle, who won a state House seat in November 2007 from Kansas. While Jindal gave up his seat to contest successfully for the post of Louisiana Governor, and by all accounts, will enter the presidential nomination sweepstakes in 2012, another keenly awaited contest this year for Indian Americans is that of 30-year old Ashwin Madia. Madia, who is an Iraq War veteran, is contesting for the US House of Representatives from Minnesota on the Democrat Farmer-Labor ticket against the only other contestant, Republican Erik Paulsen.

The trajectory of these politicians show two trends. Whilst some of them have taken the time-honoured American way of being proving their mettle in local fora such as School Boards, and used their track record there to power their way into state level positions, others such as Bobby Jindal and Kris Kolleru have started out as policy wonks, and then taken on party affiliations and shifted to the state and national stage. Two names that figure prominently in the current elections are Neera Tandon, and Preeta Bansal. Tandon, currently Domestic Policy Director for the Obama Campaign, was Deputy Campaign manager during Hillary Clinton's bid for the US Senate and Policy Director during Clinton's Presidential Nomination campaign. She was invited to join the Obama Campaign after he won the Democratic Nomination. Similarly, Bansal who is a former Solicitor General of the State of New York, is one of the top advisors to the Obama Campaign on immigration issues. Both of them are, therefore, frontrunners for positions in an Obama Administration, if it comes to pass. While there are comparably fewer Indian Americans on John McCain's team, Ashley Tellis, India-born strategic analyst and key architect of the recently concluded civilian nuclear deal between the two countries, is his advisor on South Asia.

There are several other disparate threads that need to be picked up to see the diverse impact of Indian Americans on the presidential elections. Recent reports, for instance, have noted that as they spread out across the country, Indian Americans are entering into a position of being swing voters in several key states in the event of a close election. The recognition of Indian Americans as a significant factor in US politics was reflected in the large number of delegates of Indian origin to the Democratic National Convention, as well as the credentialing of Sepia Mutiny, a blog site run by second generation *desis*, to report on the convention. The Republican candidate, John McCain, for his part, has not spared any opportunity to remind Indian American voters of his support for India-US ties, knowing the strong links they retain with their country of origin.

Irrespective of who wins the Presidential elections, Indian Americans can be truly proud of the fact that they have been an integral part of both the process and the outcome. This augurs well for this relatively young minority community that has been a rising star on

the American firmament. They also serve as one of the intangible elements that cement the India US special relationship.