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Maria do Céu Pinto

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Portuguese Institute of International Relations and Security (IPRIS)

Rua Vitorino Nemésio, 5

1750-306 Lisboa

PORTUGAL

Email: ipris@ipris.org

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Paulo Gorjão

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Portuguese Institute of International Relations and Security (IPRIS)

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Chapters in books: Manuel Ennes Ferreira, "China in Angola: Just a Passion for Oil?", in Christopher Alden, Daniel Large and Ricardo Soares de Oliveira (eds.), *China Returns to Africa: A Rising Power and a Continent Embrace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 295-317.

Articles in journals: Paulo Gorjão, "Japan's Foreign Policy and East Timor, 1975-2002" (*Asian Survey*, Vol. 42, No. 5, September/October 2002), pp. 754-771.

Articles in newspapers: Paulo Gorjão, "UN needs coherent strategy to exit from East Timor" (*Jakarta Post*, 19 May 2004), p. 25.

5. Diagrams and tables should be avoided, or kept to a minimum.

Prospects for US Policy in the Middle East under Barack Obama

MARIA DO CÉU PINTO*
Professor at the University of Minho

The Middle East and Southwest Asia are the geographic areas in which the United States is now most deeply engaged militarily, where it is fighting two wars, from whence threats to the homeland have originated in the post-Cold War period. They are thus the areas which are imposing the most critical demands on US capacities and leadership. President Barack Obama faces a daunting challenge to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan honourably, to restore the Arab-Israeli peace process, to engage Iran and Syria constructively while stemming terrorism in the Arab world and beyond. These are overwhelming assignments. Obama promised to work for change, a change that must come about for the sake of restoring America's credibility and moral leadership abroad, but also because it best serves the United States' overall strategic interests and prevents destabilisation in these regions.

President Barack Obama will have to reprioritize and reorient US policy toward the Middle East. Firstly, he must give it greater priority. Secondly, he must get involved personally and put the weight of the White House behind persuading Congress and the American people, the international community, Arabs and Israelis. Thirdly, over the past six years policy has been dominated by Iraq. This need not, and should not, continue to be the case, especially as the Arab-Israeli conflict takes centre stage.

Withdrawing from Iraq

President Bush boosted troop numbers in the so-called "troop surge" so as to tackle a growing insurgency, and resisted any timetable for a withdrawal. US officials resisted committing firmly to a specific date for a final pullout, insisting that it would be wiser to set a target date linked to the attainment of certain agreed-upon goals. The United Nations mandate authorizing the American presence expired on December 31. The end of the UN mandate - put into place soon after the invasion in March 2003 - means Iraq will now take greater control of its security.

Obama opposed going to war and warned of "an occupation of undetermined length, with undetermined costs, and undetermined consequences."¹ During the presidential

campaign, he repeatedly pledged to end the war in Iraq and to bring the troops home. However, his positions have fluctuated over time. On 30 January 2007, in a speech from the floor of the Senate, Barack Obama introduced the *Iraq War De-escalation Act of 2007*.² Senator Obama said that the surge would worsen security in Iraq and unveiled a plan to withdraw all forces by March 2008.³ That was shortly after Bush proposed the surge. The bill did not pass, but the surge did.

During the presidential campaign, Obama called for withdrawing one or two combat brigades a month over 16 months, beginning in January. That would be by the summer of 2010. Still, he wanted to leave himself some flexibility and wiggle room: Obama talked about keeping a "residual force" of unspecified size 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. Those forces will not build permanent bases in Iraq, but will continue to train and support Iraqi security forces as long as Iraqi leaders move toward political reconciliation and the building of a strong and integrated national security force.⁴ On his campaign website section on Iraq, Obama says: "We must be as careful getting out of Iraq as were careless getting in." Furthermore, Obama said: "The removal of our troops will be responsible and phased, directed by military commanders on the ground and done in consultation with the Iraqi government."⁵

Obama stuck with a strategy of early withdrawal even after the successes of the surge became evident. However, Obama's strategic rationale for a speedy withdrawal was put forward in a statement on 15 July 2008, when Obama said the US military involvement in Iraq "distracts us from every threat that we face and so many opportunities we could seize." The Iraq war, he argued, "diminishes our security, our standing in the world, our military, our economy, and the resources that we need to confront the challenges of the 21st century." Accordingly, Obama said he wanted the removal of US combat brigades, with some redeployed to Afghanistan by the summer of 2010. Speaking during her confirmation hearing, Senator Hillary Clinton, the future Secretary of State, called the withdrawal of US troops a "primary priority" and said it would occur within the context of the current Status of Forces Agreement.⁶

The Pentagon is moving to get three of the four combat brigades requested by commanders into Afghanistan by the summer. Defence Secretary Robert Gates said a key "course correction" in the Afghanistan war for the new administration will be to build the Afghan army and better cooperate with Kabul on security operations.⁷ Sen. Clinton said the Obama administration hopes to remove US troops from Iraqi cities and villages by June 2009, and redeploy some of those troops to Afghanistan. She called current US engagement in Afghanistan the "greatest priority for the president-elect."⁸

The forces tied down in Iraq are unavailable for other priority tasks, including backing his diplomacy with the credible threat of force, which could be the case in the future with Iran.

Two days after Obama won the presidency, the US military conceded many of the Iraqi government's demands regarding the status of forces agreement (SOFA), which would

allow US forces to stay on Iraqi soil after the UN mandate authorizing the US troop presence expired at the end of 2008. On 27 November, the Iraqi Parliament ratified a security agreement to pull back from Iraq's towns and cities by the middle of 2009, and to leave the country by the end of 2011. The accord also curbs US powers to detain Iraqi citizens and conduct military operations. In many respects, the Iraqi government demanded its sovereignty, and the US, surprisingly, released its grip.

The SOFA should allow the new American president to reinterpret his campaign pledges on Iraq in a more flexible way, deferring to the military's advice during the next three years.

However, opposition to Obama's pledge to withdraw combat troops from Iraq according to a 16-month timetable is wide and deep in the US national security establishment and its political allies. US military leaders have been unequivocal in rejecting any such rapid withdrawal from Iraq. Admiral Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, opposes Obama's timeline for withdrawal as "dangerous", insisting that "reductions must depend on conditions on the ground". Along with General David H. Petraeus, former military commander in Iraq and now the head of CENTCOM, and responsible for the entire Middle East, and General Ray Odierno, the new commander in Iraq, Mullen was portrayed as part of a group of military officers opposed to Obama's timeline.⁹

The promotion of Robert M. Gates as Barack Obama's secretary of defence has been construed as the key element in the campaign by military officials and their supporters in the political elite to pressure Obama into dropping his withdrawal plan.¹⁰

A Grand Bargain with Iran

The Obama campaign criticized the Bush administration for rebuffing offers from Tehran for comprehensive negotiations in 2003, and promised "tough, direct presidential diplomacy" with "preparations" but not "preconditions." "When President Bush decided we're not going to talk to Iran ... you know what happened?" Mr. Obama said during the October 7 candidate's debate. "Iran went from zero centrifuges to develop nuclear weapons to 4,000."¹¹ His rival, John McCain, ridiculed Mr. Obama for offering to talk without requiring Iran to suspend uranium enrichment - the Bush administration's position.

The new administration will likely launch a new diplomatic initiative with Tehran. The Bush administration may improve the climate for talks for the coming administration; it is already moving toward restoring partial diplomatic relations with Iran. It could create opportunities for the incoming foreign policy team of President Barack Obama. An administration plan to open a "US-interests section" in the Swiss Embassy in Tehran has been endorsed by State Department officials and has won the backing of some senior policymakers, like former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Since mid-2008 it was

expected that the request would be made after the US election. It is not clear how Iran will respond. US diplomats have had no formal relations with Iran since 1979.

At the same time, the Bush administration has intensified economic sanctions against Iran - something Obama also favours. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) released, in November 2008, its latest report on the implementation of NPT safeguards in Iran and the status of Iran's compliance with Security Council Resolutions 1737, 1747 and 1803. The report shows Iran's continued non-compliance with these resolutions and includes two important findings. The first is that Iran continues to make progress on developing and operating its centrifuges and plans to significantly increase the number of operational centrifuges. The second is that Iran continues to resist efforts to address substantively its alleged nuclear weapons-related work, which the IAEA says remains of serious concern.

In dealing with Iran, the new administration should create a strategy based on both engagement and deterrence to prevent Iran from continuing to enrich uranium and to develop indigenous mastery over the entire nuclear fuel cycle. The United States must initiate direct talks with Iran and end the threat of regime change in Tehran while making it clear that a nuclear Iran is not acceptable, neither for the US nor the international community. Ideally, this can be accomplished by pursuing three tracks of separate but interconnected negotiations. The first track should focus on negotiating an end to Iran's enrichment of uranium without preconditions, with an economic incentive package provided in return. The United States must lead in these negotiations, but should be joined by its European allies, as well as China and Russia. The second track ought to focus on Iran's and the United States' grievances against each other so as to build mutual confidence and create momentum for all the other negotiating tracks.

The third negotiating track should concentrate on regional security to alleviate Iran's national security concerns, while underlining the United States' commitments to the protection of its allies in the region. Should Iran, nevertheless, insist on continuing to enrich uranium, the United States must be willing to impose tougher sanctions, while not ruling out the use of force as a last resort. The United States must spearhead all three tracks without which future talks will be as baffling as the previous negotiations, except this time the West and Israel will be facing the unsettling prospect of a nuclear Iran with potentially dreadful consequences.

Any change in Iran's policy in the Middle East will depend on the Obama administration's policy acknowledging a fundamental "change" in recognizing Iran's key interests and accepting its role in the region and in Iraq. The West confronts an Iranian regime that has increased its influence in the broader region. The overthrow of Iran's historical enemies in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the decline of America's influence in the Middle East, generated a recognition that the Islamic Republic is in a position to claim the mantle of regional leadership. Furthermore, political-security issues in the Levant are linked with power-sharing conflicts in the Persian Gulf. Iran now plays a key role in both regions. Ira-

nian willingness to deal with the United States on Iraq now depends on relatively greater Iranian capabilities and leverage. Iran has a rare historical opportunity to emerge as the pivotal power in the Persian Gulf, a role that both the late Shah and the ruling clergy have aspired to for decades.

Looming over the Gaza conflict is the long shadow of Iran, which has much to win or lose from the outcome of the battles raging after Israel launched its devastating onslaught to stop Hamas' rocket attacks. For Iran, which provides funding and training for Hamas, the crisis represents an important stepping stone in its quest to become a regional superpower, in which Hamas plays a key role as an extension of Shiite Iranian influence. "Iran stands to gain more influence if Hamas survives, because Hamas is a direct auxiliary for Iran - an Iranian foothold on the Mediterranean," according to Oussama Safa, head of the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies.¹² So far, Iran has not indicated any desire to see an escalation. Some analysts think Hamas is not an Iranian puppet - it came into being without Iranian support and its goal of retrieving territory for a future Palestine would continue irrespective of Iranian help. Iran has, it is true, been sympathetic to Hamas' situation, particularly since the US-endorsed Palestinian elections of 2006, when Hamas won the majority of votes, allowing it to form a government. Subsequently, the new Palestinian government was rejected by Israel and the United States, and an economic embargo plunged the Palestinians into economic chaos. There is another reason: Hamas, a Sunni fundamentalist movement, is important to Iran because it helps give Iran credibility among the Arabs. The targets of Iran's campaign over Gaza are also the Arab regimes - Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. The intent is to use the support for Iran's anti-Israeli position in the Arab street as an instrument of propaganda.

Noisy displays of outrage on the streets of Tehran and other Iranian cities may have offered a useful diversion from the country's economic distress, which is to the benefit of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who faces an election this year. At the international level, Iranian leaders have confined their fiery anti-Israeli rhetoric to efforts to pressure Arab and world leaders to push Israel to accept a cease-fire, one that would enable Hamas to survive. Thousands of hard-line student groups volunteered to carry out suicide missions against Israel, but Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, forbade them from travelling.¹³

An US-Iranian agreement would only be possible if it represented a fundamental change in the US-Iran relationship, based on a new understanding on the Middle East and of Iran's role in it. Iran feels that up to now it needs to base its policies across the region on the assumption of American hostility. Iranian officials and analysts see the problem of US-Iranian relations as an interlinked web of issues on which agreement must be reached as a whole. The Bush administration's confrontational policies, especially in post-invasion Iraq, have deepened the political-strategic gap in Iran-US relations. The two countries regard the growth of each other's role in the region as a zero-sum game.

According to Takeyk, "neither economic distress nor additional sanctions are likely to alter Tehran's course. The most effective means of addressing Iran's proliferation tendencies is to alter its strategic calculus. The most persuasive means of altering Iran's decision-making must be anchored in power, not commerce. Iran's leaders remain more sensitive to their strategic environment than economic predicament. The international community needs to create a situation whereby Iran's leadership sees strategic benefits in abiding by international norms."¹⁴ A real change by Obama's administration should be fundamental and based on redefining Iran's role in US regional policies and on changing the traditional policy of "balance of power", which is a source of tension and war in Iran's relations with neighbouring states. Such a policy is secured at the expense of Iran's insecurity.¹⁵

The prevailing view in Iran is that no fundamental change will happen in Iran-US relations during Obama's administration and the United States will continue its policies of increasing political pressure and sanctions on Iran. "Nothing will basically change with Obama," said a foreign editor for one of Iran's most prominent newspapers. "He is one of them; someone from the system, despite his slogans."¹⁶ The choice of Dennis Ross as the administration's Iran coordinator is likely to create discomfort in the Iranian government. Ross is a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a think tank that Iranians regard as a Zionist lobby in the US administration. Based on pessimism and caution, such an evaluation originates "from the traditional and strategic concerns of Iranian statecraft, which essentially believe that the main strategy of the US is to minimize Iran's role in its political-security backyard, especially in the Persian Gulf. From this perspective, no matter whether a Democrat or a Republican president is in the White House, US foreign policy in the region will be based on certain sustained strategic principles such as preserving a "balance of power" in the Persian Gulf and "enhancing Israel's role" in the Levant. Such policies exclude Iran from the region political-security order, dis-integrate Iran from the region's economic activities, deny Iran's rightful nuclear program, and generally construe Iran as the main threat and source of instability in the region."¹⁷ These policies seek to minimize Iran's influence, a position Iran cannot tolerate.

On the other hand, a "grand bargain" on all major issues in contention is possible, based on a joint recognition of the threat from al Qaeda and related terrorist groups. Iranian officials appear to recognise that the United States and Iran do have some objective interests in common in the region. A US-Iran understanding on both Iraq and Afghanistan would be central to any such agreement. Despite past US policies threatening Iranian interests, there are potential opportunities for US-Iranian cooperation in the region. In the recent past, Iran has dealt directly with the United States on both Afghanistan and Iraq. It participated in a series of secret meetings with American diplomats in Geneva from late 2001 to the spring of 2003 before Bush administration terminated them. Iran and the United States oppose the same enemy - Sunni extremism - in Af-

ghanistan, providing an objective foundation for a broader regional accord. Perhaps the most politically sensitive issue for both sides in any broad U.S.-Iran negotiation, apart from Iran's nuclear programme, would be Iran's relations with Hezbollah and other anti-Israel organisations, such as Hamas.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Out of the Deadlock?

The military incursion which has made hundreds of Palestinians casualties further complicates President Barack Obama's challenge to achieve a Middle East peace - something that eluded the preceding Bush and Clinton administrations. With time running out on the Bush presidency, the administration seemed increasingly ready to let the crisis in Gaza fall to Barack Obama. The Bush administration worked to secure a cease-fire, but it blamed the renewed violence on the militant Islamic group Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, saying it broke a cease-fire by firing rockets and mortars deep into Israeli territory.

Israel's military onslaught against the militant Hamas movement will probably make it harder for Obama to fulfil a campaign pledge of early and vigorous Mideast peacemaking, and the pre-inauguration timing may frustrate any effort he plans to establish a new footing among Arab partners. The situation in Gaza is likely to further feed the extremists on all sides. It will further inflame anti-Americanism, will bind up President Obama's options for movement on these issues, and will ruin many potentially previous available options for bringing peace to the Middle East.

Mamoun Fandy, quoted by Thomas L. Friedman in an op-ed piece, said: "The Gaza that Israel left in 2005 was bordering Egypt. The Gaza that Israel just came back to is now bordering Iran. Iran has become the ultimate confrontation state. I am not sure we can talk just about 'Arab-Israeli peace' or the 'Arab peace initiative' anymore. We may be looking at an 'Iranian initiative.'" "In short, the whole notion of Arab-Israeli peacemaking likely will have to change."¹⁸ Israel has given strong indications that the conflict between Hamas and Israel is a conflict between Israel and Iran. It is impressive to see how Israeli intelligence, Egyptian intelligence and eminent US commentators are supporting the same line about a new Axis of Evil: Iran/Hamas/Hezbollah. Other commentators say that Iran certainly supports Hamas, but by equating the two, one attributes a strategic significance to the Hamas-Israeli conflict which is exaggerated. This reasoning is self-defeating for Israel, and for the US. Those who echo this equation are only compounding the problem.

The president-elect has pledged to honour the "important bond"¹⁹ between the United States and Israel. David Axelrod, senior adviser to Obama, said "He wants to be a constructive force in helping to bring about the peace and security that both the Israelis and the Palestinians want and deserve."²⁰ Pressed about how much support Obama will offer Israel, Axelrod said: "He's going to work closely with the Israelis. They're a great ally of

ours, the most important ally in the region. ... But he will do so in a way that will promote the cause of peace, and work closely with the Israelis and the Palestinians on that - toward that objective."²¹ Scholar Jon Alterman said: "I think Obama will be supportive of Israel, but will bring a little more scepticism to it. I think Obama will start from premise that Israel is an ally, but that we have to look at this fresh."²²

Obama's public statements reflect a significantly more even-handed position than the general American political map.²³ Obama said that his administration would ask Israel to share responsibility for changing the status quo, and would help "Israelis to identify and strengthen those partners who are truly committed to peace."

A Palestinian state established in Gaza and most of the West Bank, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side-by-side with Israel, remains the only viable solution to end the conflict. The return of the Golan Heights to Syria is essential to resolving the Israeli-Syrian conflict. The new president said "sustained American leadership for peace and security will require patient effort and the personal commitment of the president of the United States. That is a commitment I will make."²⁴ He must play an active and direct role between Israelis and Palestinians by appointing a presidential envoy with a broad mandate that must stay in the region as an agreement is forged.²⁵

While Obama has reiterated America's loyalty to Israel as its closest ally in the Middle East, he must also show that he can be an honest broker in the region when it comes to creating a Palestinian state. It is also of paramount importance that other Arab states in the region with good relations with Israel and the US, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Morocco, are engaged at the outset of all peace efforts.

The hurdles facing those political leaders who want to reach a peace agreement based on the two-state solution have grown. The Palestinians are in the midst of an internal fray between the old-guard of Fatah and the fundamentalist Hamas ideologues who control the Gaza strip. There is no agreed upon leadership to negotiate with. Israel is in the throes of a grave crisis of leadership. General elections are scheduled for February 2009 and there is no widely respected or overwhelmingly popular leader in sight. Even with an existential threat looming over the country, the candidates and party lists are unattractive and the political landscape is bleak. It will be practically impossible for the winner of the upcoming elections to be in a position to break the deadlock and make peace with the Palestinians.

Endnotes

- * This article was developed within the project PPCDT/CPO/56994/2004, approved by FCT and by POCI 2010, with financing from FEDER.
- 1 "War in Iraq", Obama'08 website.
 - 2 See "To state United States policy for Iraq, and for other purposes", 110th Congress, 1st Session S. 433.
 - 3 Shailagh Murray, "Obama Bill Sets Date For Troop Withdrawal - Candidate Goes Further Than Rivals" (*Washington Post*, 31 January 2007).
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 - 25 Alon Ben-Meir, "Obama's Daunting Middle East Challenge" (*Middle East Times*, 13 November 2008).