




Written by on November 5, 2008

Overseas Reaction to Obama Win

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown stated  in London: "The relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom is vital to our prosperity and security. Barack Obama ran an inspirational campaign, energizing politics with his progressive values and his vision for the future."

While many of the statements from foreign leaders, such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel's comment that the German government was "fully aware of the importance and of the worth of our transatlantic partnership," fit the mold of standard congratulatory rhetoric, European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso's words proposing a joint partnership between the United States and the EU to deal with the world financial crisis were somewhat more revealing. "We need to change the current crisis into a new opportunity. We need a new deal for a new world," said Barroso. Barroso's words were a direct allusion to U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal" economic program of the Depression-era 1930s that greatly expanded the role of the U.S. federal government and launched America's modern-day social-welfare state.

Volker Perthes, director of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, was quoted by Reuters news service as expressing concern about the trade policies of an Obama administration. He said: "The worry, in the midst of the financial crisis, is that protectionist tendencies will grow under a Democratic president."

Gholamali Haddad Adel, a senior adviser to the Iranian leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said the United States must change its policies "to get rid of the quagmire made by President Bush." Another aide to Khamenei said there was "capacity for the improvement" of U.S.-Iranian relations "if Obama pursues his campaign promises," reported the Reuters news agency. Among Obama's campaign statements have been calls for negotiations with Iran.

In a statement sent to the Agence France-Presse (AFP) news agency, a spokesman for the Gaza-based Palestinian terrorist group Hamas said that President-elect Obama "must learn from the mistakes of the previous administrations" and improve global ties rather than "wave the big American stick."

A Saudi business man named Ali al-Harithi shared his view of the U.S. election with AFP in Dubai: "This confirms that the U.S. and its people are not racist. The American people chose Obama, who is African [by origin] and whose father is Muslim, to voice rejection of policies of the conservatives in the outgoing administration."

There was a vast difference of opinion in the Middle East about Obama's perceived stance with regard to conflicts between Israel and its Arab neighbors. A man named Mohammed Fayad in Gaza, apparently thought Obama would be a firm supporter of Israel: "We do not know him. Things are not clear now. We do not know whether he will follow the policy of his predecessor and bow to the Jewish lobby."

In contrast, Shoshana Bair, an Israeli charity worker, expressed fear that Obama would favor the Palestinians, rather than Israel. She told AP news: "There's no doubt great apprehension. On the face of things it's frightening."

Reactions have also come from within the Russian government. Konstantin Kosachyov, head of the



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international affairs committee of the Duma, the lower house of the legislature, stated that Obama is seen as a "more suitable" partner to engage Russia than would be John McCain. "With Barack Obama there is a chance for U.S.-Russian relations, a hope that something may change for the better," said Kosachyov.

As news of Obama's victory reached Iraq, Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari spoke to Al-Arabiyah TV and expressed his government's opinion: "We don't expect any change to happen overnight or any hasty change in U.S. policy and commitment toward Iraq." Zebari also expressed the opinion that Obama "will not have the same enthusiasm and momentum for this situation [in Iraq]" as President Bush.

And Salim Abdullah, spokesman for the largest Sunni bloc in Iraq's parliament, concurred, telling AP: "We are not concerned that he will take a unilateral decision to move troops quickly from Iraq."

Holding a different opinion, however, was Salah al-Obeidi, the spokesman for the Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, a staunch opponent of the U.S. military presence in Iraq. Said al-Obeidi: "We expect that big changes will take place."

Probably the most enthusiastic reaction to Obama's election occurred in Kenya, from which Obama's father, Barack Hussein Obama, Sr., came. In honor of Obama's election, President Mwai Kibaki has declared November 6 a public holiday in Kenya.

"We the Kenyan people are immensely proud of your Kenyan roots," President Mwai Kibaki openly addressed Obama.

In South Africa, Nelson Mandela, South Africa's first black president (and previously the leader of the communist-controlled African National Congress), said in a letter congratulating Obama on his election: "Your victory has demonstrated that no person anywhere in the world should not dare to dream of wanting to change the world for a better place."

The BBC's world affairs correspondent Adam Mynott reported that Africans will look to Obama to deliver more than the Bush administration's \$15 billion AIDS relief program when he takes office, and it will be difficult for him to meet Africans' raised expectations.



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