

TRENDS IN THE CURRENT U. S. FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

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Abstract

The article entitled “Trends in the current U.S. foreign and security policy” is devoted to a brief analysis of the contemporary position of the United States in the world and evaluates specific approaches of the U.S. towards selected security problems. The piece has no ambition to be the exhaustive and overall analysis but it rather focuses on selected interesting and, according to the author’s opinion, significant trends or factors important for better understanding the U.S. foreign policy or relevant in terms of the next development and direction.

Key words

U.S.A., foreign and security policy, trends.

Economic and military position of the U.S. in the world

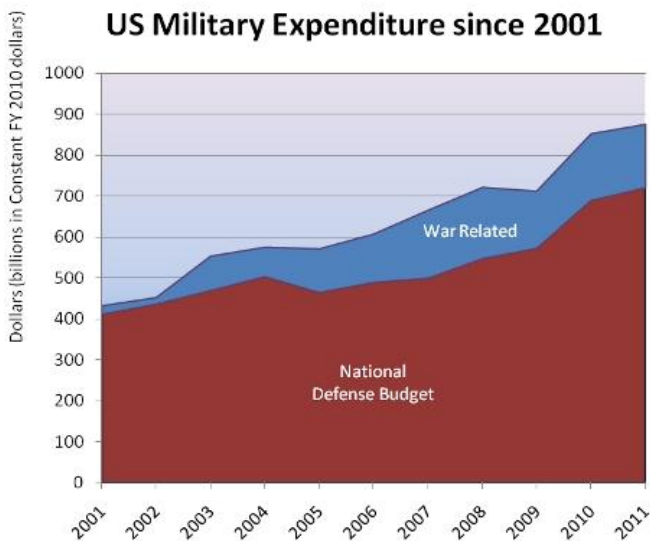
The United States is the commonwealth with a predominant position in a current system of international relations. So far they have been having the strongest national economy but their share of the global GDP has been constantly decreasing which is by virtue of the advancement of other states and economic blocs (BRIC – Brazil, Russia, India, China and also the European Union. According to the estimate of the Gold & Sachs company the United States will be replaced by the developing China already around 2030 (three years ago and before the rise of the economic recession the same company estimated this taking up not early than in 2050. In a global scale a relative weakening of economic position of the U.S. has been occurring and the United States are not capable to prevent it and therefore they try to keep the supremacy of a militarily strongest country. Operable and globally usable armed forces supported by active diplomacy and economic influence have been and probably will represent extremely important tool to put through the national interests of the U.S. in a highly competitive and more and more globalized world.

At the same time, keeping the position of a superpower enables the United States to perform the autonomous foreign and security policy to a certain degree, in the last resort also regardless other states or actors in the system of international relations or even against their will. The U.S. military potential is the result of the long-term economic, political and diplomatic investments and has definitely its

origin already at times of the Second World War and especially in the period of the Cold War. Its end at the turn of the 80th and 90th of the last century, the downfall of the bipolar world and the disappearance of the traditional enemy – the Soviet Union, the lead of the United States in the field of the military capabilities development even more accentuated. In comparison with the countries of the Western Europe which collected so called peace dividends in the 90th, the United States expenses on defense and security remained basically on the same level as in the 80th, at times of the competition in the armament with the Soviet Union.

The further fierce and continual increase of expenses occurs after 2001¹ in connection with the U.S. joining the international terrorism fighting and military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today the United States expenses make approximately a half of worldwide expenses on defense and security and are about a frame higher than in other significant states (Great Britain, France, Russia, China). Maintaining high expenses together with higher effectiveness of their spending enables the United States to maintain and even escalate the military lead ahead of other states, including their European allies. Besides this other tens of billions of dollars the U.S. spend on ensuring the homeland security, population and critical infrastructure protection.

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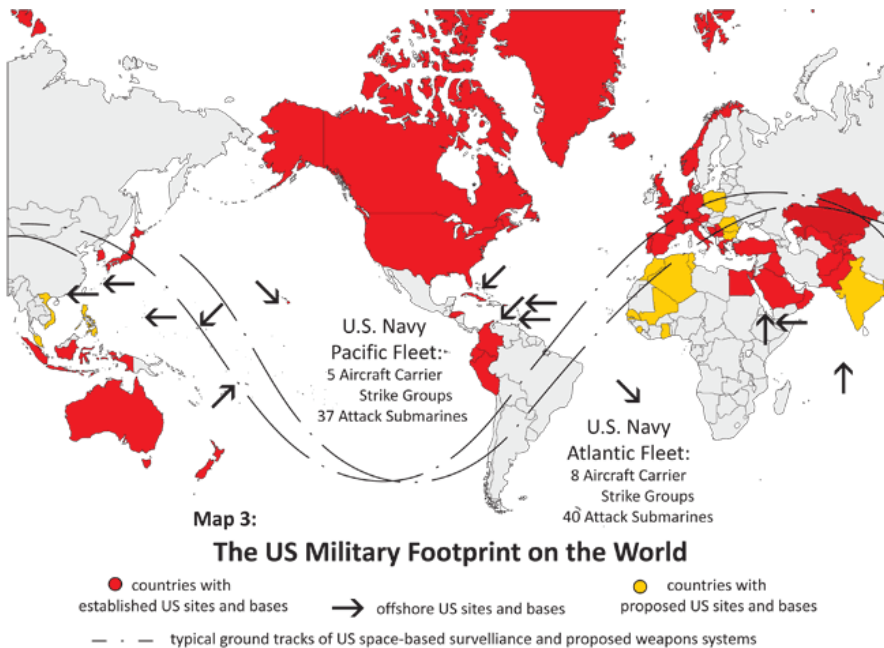


Source: Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, May 2010

Defense budget includes nuclear weapons related activities of the Department of Energy, which is normally separate from base defense budget

Taken from: *Global Issues* [online]. July 7, 2010 [cit. 2010-12-12]. World Military Spending. Available at WWW: <<http://www.globalissues.org/article/75/world-military-spending#USMilitarySpending>>.

In the past two decades the U.S. have created or enlarged the net of military bases abroad and allied bonds which enable them to control world communications and key raw-materials areas. If we apply the games theory on the description of the functioning of an international relations system, then it is a game with a zero result when the profit of one state is compensated by the loss of the other state. The downfall of the Soviet Union and the weakening of Russia in the past decades enabled a factual expansion of American military and political presence in new geographic areas. This does not mean only expansion of the NATO into the countries of Central and Eastern Europe including the acceptance of former Soviet Union republics into the Alliance, massive penetration into the Middle East but also building strong bilateral structures in states of former Soviet Central Asia etc. Despite the fact that the U.S. in the lastly given regions are getting now due to the aggressive and ambitious Russian foreign policy into the defensive, it is evident that the U.S. are capable and willing to influence the course of events in key regions of interest even with using the armed forces.



Source: US Department of Defense, *Base Structure Report*, 2008.

Taken from: VOGEL, Richard D. *Combating Globalization: Confronting the Impact of Neoliberal Free Trade Policies on Labor and the Environment. From the Left: A US Forum on Combating Globalism* [online]. 2009, 1, [cit. 2010-10-15].

Available at WWW: http://combatingglobalization.com/articles/combating_globalization4.html.

This projection of the American power and expansion of the military presence is the result of activities of Bill Clinton administration and first of all of George Walker Bush who reached his peak in his second presidential term. However, on the other hand, just during the administration of G. Bush junior the limits of American foreign and security policy developed and they accentuated even more with the rise of a global economic recession.

Even for an economically advanced and militarily strong country such as the United States have been, this expansion way of pushing through the national interests has been very demanding and even more at times of the developing economic and financial crisis. To this fact it was necessary to add the growing unpopularity of the United States and the president Bush abroad, worsening relations with key partners - heavy cooling of relations with Russia, disputations with China but also it is worth mentioning the dispute with the European Union e.g. the issue of supporting the invasion in Iraq.

Controversial global war with the international terrorism connected with factual strengthening of military presence in the Middle East and Central Asia, pushing through legally disputable preemptive strategies in reality, the invasion in Iraq and Afghanistan, tactless behavior of the American president against the Muslim world etc., all these produced the growing resistance of the world public against the policy of the United States that was strongly personified and identified with a cowboy character of George Bush junior.

At the same time the American public perceived the growing isolation of the United States and more over very sensitively responded to introduction of controversial or illegal practice of security forces justified by the fight against terrorism and protection of American interests and values (the establishment of the prison Guantánamo in Cuba, torturing of persons suspected of terrorism, the affair Abu-Ghraib, so called targeted assassinations etc.). Apart from this the U.S. had to deal with a range of homeland problems, e.g. social consequences of initiating economic recession, the issue of a health reform, growing unemployment etc., to which the Bush administration according to the Americans did not pay a sufficient attention.

Therefore when on January 20, 2009 the democratic politician Barack Obama became new American president, this change was perceived not only as the basic change of American foreign policy and the change of the picture of the U.S. abroad. The entrance of the president with black skin, a globetrotter, man with legal education and practice in the field of social affairs was to a great extent perceived as a revolutionary divide, as the beginning of a new epoch of the United States. This expectation was shared by most parts of the world and the first step of president Obama as the head of the state was to encourage these hopes.

This was reflected e.g. by awarding Barack Obama the Nobel prize for Peace in October 2009. The Norway committee for the awarding gave reasons for this choice *"Obama's endeavor to reduce proliferation of nuclear weapons and pushing through the new climate in international relations, especially towards the Muslim world."*²

Today, with a certain off-set, it is necessary to say that hopes laid on new president have not been always saturated. The reason is the character of the American policy, principles and mechanisms of its generation. Despite the fact that

the president plays a very important role and specifically Barack Obama may moreover rely on a real “dream team” set up of people such as Hillary Clinton, Robert Gates, James Jones or James Panetta, he is not the one who autonomously makes the policy and pushes it through. He relies, that is to say, on massive qualified apparatus which in itself excludes dramatic-like deviations in American foreign and security policy and on the contrary ensures its continuity. In other words its form depends on the personality of the president less than expected and its basic motive remains the most effective, continual and trustful defense of national interests whereas first and foremost it is the security of the United States, their citizens, allies and partners.

From this viewpoint it is necessary to assess real possibilities of the new administration. Barack Obama tried to rather regulate the course of foreign policy of the U.S. than change it basically. In the number of areas he even failed or succeeded partially despite the fact that he based his election campaign on the critique of the steps of Bush presidency. The Guantánamo prison in Cuba has been still working where persons convicted of terrorism on the base of doubtful legal justification have been still detained. Almost nobody was punished for creating the system of despotism of security forces which enabled torturing prisoners and captures in Cuba and Iraq, also the existence of secret prisons of CIA has not been properly explained etc.

A substantial change is noticeable in a current American approach to foreign partners and addressing present most poignant security issues.

In relation to Russian Federation a substantial warming of mutual relations is being marked based on strengthening of mutual trustfulness and convenience. Hillary Clinton during her visit to Russia in spring 2009 spoke about so called reset of American-Russian relations.³ Despite certain successes in relations with Moscow which was e.g. ratification of the agreement on restriction of the number of nuclear weapons at the Prague Summit in spring this year, the critics of Obama’s administration warn about a possibly too soft even naïve approach to Russia. Just for explanation, in January this year the adopted Military Doctrine of Russian Federation has been still perceiving the U.S. and the North-Atlantic Alliance as the enemy and military threat.⁴

At least since the entrance of president Bill Clinton the American foreign policy has lost its Europe-centric character and has been aimed much more at relations with Asia. Europe, resp. the European Union and European members of the NATO represent for the U.S. today allies relatively without problems, however rather clumsy. According to the statement of the American expert Fareed Zakaria the U.S. and Europe today make up 50 % of global GDP and gather 85 % of world military capacities.⁵ However, the deployability of European soldiers outside Europe, e.g. in Iraq or Afghanistan, has always faced national political and economic limits which is not for the American representatives often easy to imagine or explain. Europe from the military viewpoint has still fallen behind the United States and the ability to cover the ambitions of the European Union to be a global player is quite disputable. For the present Europe represents for the U.S. though the most reliable, culturally, politically and militarily the closest ally but its significance has been relatively decreasing and its potential remains from the United States viewpoint

unused.

China has become a much more significant partner and at the same time a rival. Its dynamic economic growth, growing dependence of America on China import and today a factual role as a creditor of the U.S. (China keeps roughly 30 % of American obligations), make the country the priority of American foreign, security and economic policy. In this regard it is necessary to understand the American engagement in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Freshly the Middle and Near East are the areas nowadays where the United States feel troubles. The invasion into Iraq, operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, Iranian nuclear program, support of Israel; this all on one hand means more distinctive and long-term American presence in the region, on the other hand it results in enormous political, military and financial expenses which start to be beyond the U.S. resources. In this context it is necessary to observe the increasing emphasize on diplomatic solutions (e.g. appointing special envoys for the Middle East, Pakistan and Afghanistan) or the president's New-year's speech to Iranian people in 2009 or the speech for the Muslim world at Cairo university in April the same year.

First of all the end of unpopular war in Iraq was a crowd-puller for presidential election campaign of Barack Obama, paradoxically after his election further massive increase of American military presence in the Middle East occurred. Nevertheless current American policy on Iraq is considered to be a success, as long as we consider a success the reality that over 4500 American soldiers were killed and over 30 000 American soldiers were wounded and for the present the operation Iraqi Freedom has cost the American people more than 900 billion dollars. The end of war operations of American forces on August 31, 2010, their reduction to approximately 50 000 persons and a complete withdrawal till the end of the year enables though the United States to focus on addressing the situation in Afghanistan. Despite the increase of military presence in this country to c. 90 000 soldiers, even here, though, the decline from former more ambitious goals of Bush administration is obvious which means from the ambition to change Afghanistan into a democratic, safe and functional state. On March 27, 2009 president Obama announced a new strategy of the fight against Al-Qaida in Pakistan and Afghanistan whose goal is first of all and almost only to paralyse this organization and its forcing out of mentioned countries.⁶

According to the author's opinion, the above mentioned changes beside others reflect the reality that more expressively than in the past the American foreign policy is forced to have regard to possibilities of homeland economy and public meaning who prefers rather ensuring of its own personal security before remote and with everyday life seemingly unrelated engagements abroad.

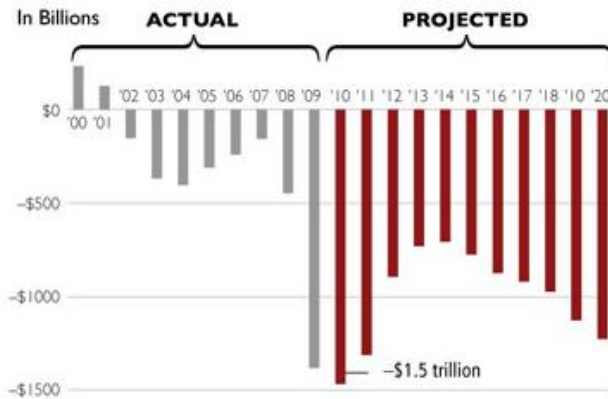
If in the past two decades the expenses connected with spreading the American influence and ensuring defense and security substantially increased and still fifteen years ago the American economic prognoses were involved in the issue of decreasing taxes and foreseen fiscal surpass, today's United States have fallen into a debt trap. Just the packet of laws and measures to mitigate and overcome the consequences of economic and financial crisis, so called American Recovery and

Reinvestment Act of 2009 brings expenses of 787 billion dollars funded mostly from obligations bought especially by China and Japan.⁷



Taken from: CANALI, Laura. *The Centro Asian Ring*. [1]: Heartland Geopolitical Maps, 2009. Available at WWW: <http://temi.repubblica.it/limes-heartland/the-centro-asian-ring-2/859>.

Obama Deficits Will Exceed Previous Deficits



Sources: Congressional Budget Office and Office of Management and Budget.



Taken from: CARROLL, Conn. Budget 2011: Past Deficits vs. Obama's Deficits in Pictures. *The Heritage foundation: Leadership for America* [online]. February 5, 2010 [cit.

2010-10-12]. Available at WWW: <http://blog.heritage.org/2010/02/05past-deficits-vs-obamas-deficits-in-pictures/>.

In this situation it is logical that ambitious goals of foreign and security policy which were e.g. set up by Bush administration in National security strategy of 2002, are being abandoned. Its updated version adopted in May 2010 is considerably more modest, more realistic and less ambitious.⁸ The United States are forced to so called alliance behavior, they are willing to listen more to their allies and partners in return for their diplomatic and military support. There is the evident effort to avoid controversial topics in communication with other superpowers (especially with Russia and China) and their conversion to American side at least when addressing particular problems (e.g. the issue of Iranian or North Korea nuclear programs). North-Atlantic alliance, let us say European allies are pushed to share more in military, political and financial expenses of the operation Enduring Freedom. Also a fresh American-Russian agreement on restriction of nuclear arsenals is necessary to understand in an economic context.

The issue of nuclear disarmament, let us say the effort of the U.S. to a more active control and restriction of the number of nuclear weapons represents a specific novelty in the American foreign and security policy, let us say we face the change of the reaction to the threat of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The United States are aware of the fact that more and more states reach technical, economic and military capabilities which enable them to obtain nuclear weapons and their bearers, on the other hand they have to perceive also the existence of nuclear arsenals of traditional rivals, especially Russian Federation.

Looking for a new concept of nuclear deterrence, reduction of expenses on the development and maintaining own nuclear armament and a higher need of more flexible expeditionary conventional armed forces make the U.S. retreat of the traditional role of nuclear weapons in their security and foreign policy. There is the evidence of the decrease of the dependence and relying on nuclear weapons and president Obama introduced beside others in his public speech at the Summit in Prague in 2009 the vision of the world without nuclear weapons where the United States will play a key role in a disarmament process.

Quite evidently proves the experience of the end of the 90^{ies} and first of all the shock of September 11, 2001. Much more and more intensively than in the past the Americans realize their own vulnerability and perceive it as a real possibility of attacking the U.S. right in their own territory. The shock of terrorist attacks on the targets in New York and Washington was the turning impulse not only for the area of foreign policy but first of all for the area of homeland security, justice, intelligence services and especially the area of population protection. If after the end of a Cold War this area was neglected just with regard to minimization of a risk of a nuclear attack on the territory of the U.S. from the Soviet Union side, let us say other states, then the last decade is possible to evaluate as a period of the renaissance of the interest and implementation of specific and breakthrough measures aimed to ensure more security and the level of population protection. A number of steps made on a federal level would not be paradoxically without the shock of September 11, 2001 possible to carry out,

especially because of the resistance of the public and executive branch of all states of the Union. Historically unprecedented state regulation and control of persons, goods and funds flow, introduction of new legislation and norms (at least to mention the adoption of so called Homeland Security Act in 2002), the establishment of federal structures (Department of Homeland Security) and allocation of significant finances into the area of homeland security not only did not hit fundamental resistance of the public but even at the beginning of a decade these steps were explicitly required by the public. Even in the period of financial crisis and economic recession fading, the American tax payers accept high and growing expenses on homeland security and just in 2010 the Department of Homeland Security spent more than 56 billion dollars on securing its liabilities.

United States do not rely now on only ensuring their security through their extraterritorial engagements but they also pay full attention in the areas of homeland security and population protection. Subsequently, in foreign policy the Americans more accentuate the diplomacy, the support of soft security (USAID is the biggest source of finances for the recovery of Afghanistan and Iraq), more activity of structures of collective security (the USA cover the biggest part of financial costs for peacekeeping missions of the UNO) and more intensive joining allies and partners.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that this article misses a wide range of important questions and problems in which the American foreign policy is being involved, e.g. the renewal of American influence in Latin America, the policy on Cuba, the issues of energetic and raw-material security of the United States, the participation of the USA in mitigation of consequences of negative changes of a climate etc. it is possible to make a particular general summary.

The United States are furthermore remaining militarily the most powerful state of the world and from the international relations viewpoint they maintain the post of *primus inter pares*. In comparison with previous decades the current foreign and security policy of the USA has been less ambitious, more isolationistic, more reflecting the needs for ensuring homeland security, protection and support of population. It is possible to say that American foreign and security policy is in some aspects naïve; nevertheless in any case is cohesive and more than ever aware of its limits. The change of administration and personnel change on the presidential post have not brought a dramatic or even revolutionary change of security and foreign policy of the USA though the entrance of Barack Obama was perceived as a particular dividing line and was connected with a lot of hopes in this sense. The reality is much more restrained though. The changes were often made rather at a symbolic and personnel level, the policy of Obama administration is much more continual than expected. The reason is the fact that the basis of foreign and security policy of the USA has been remaining all the same – it is first of all the defense of

national interests of the United States. Only the form of its implementation and the way of its medial and political presentation have been changing.

NOTES:

- ¹ See e.g. *The Center for Arms Control and Proliferation* [online]. 2008-2-20 [cit. 2010-11-11]. U.S. Defense Spending, 2001-2009. Available at WWW: http://www.armscontrolcenter.org/policy/securityspending/articles/defense_spending_since_2001/.
- ² *Nobelprize.org: The Official Web Site of the Nobel Prize* [online]. Oslo: October 9, 2009 [cit. 2010-10-10]. The Nobel Peace Prize 2009. Available at WWW: http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2009/press.html.
- ³ See e.g. WEIR, Fred. Clinton looks to. *The Christian Science Monitor* [online]. March 6, 2009, 100, [cit. 2010-12-12]. Available at WWW: <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Global-News/2009/0306/clinton-looks-to-reset-us-russia-relations>.
- ⁴ *Президент России* [online]. Moscow : 2010-02-05 [cit. 2010-10-10]. Указ Президента РФ от 5 февраля 2010 г. N 146 "О Военной доктрине Российской Федерации". Available at WWW: <http://text.document.kremlin.ru/SESSION/PILOT/main.htm>.
- ⁵ ANYZ, Daniel. Fareed Zakaria: Europe is the disappointment for the USA. *Economy news* [online]. 2010-10-12 [cit. 2010-11-11]. Available at WWW: <http://hn.ihned.cz/c1-47020030-fareed-zakaria-evropa-je-pro-usa-zklamanim>.
- ⁶ OBAMA, Barrack. *Council on Foreign Relations* [online]. March 27, 2009 [cit. 2010-11-12]. Obama's Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, March 2009. Available at WWW: http://www.cfr.org/publication/18952/obamas_strategy_for_afghanistan_and_pakistan_march_2009.html.
- ⁷ More specifically to given costs see USA. An Act Making supplemental appropriations for job preservation and creation, infrastructure investment, energy efficiency and science, assistance to the unemployed, and State and local fiscal stabilization, for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2009, and for other purposes. In *Public Law 111-5, 111th Congress*. 2009. Available at WWW: http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111_cong_public_laws&docid=f:publ005.pdf.
- ⁸ *National Security Strategy: May 2010*. Washington, D.C.: White House, 2010. 52 p. Available at WWW: www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss.../national_security_strategy.pdf

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