Obama's "Eisenhower Moment"

American Strategic Choices and the Transatlantic Defense Relationship

Fifty-six years to the day—Tuesday, 4 November 1952—on which determined American voters elected Dwight David Eisenhower the 34th president of the United States, an equally determined electorate chose Barack Hussein Obama as the nation's 44th chief executive. The coincidence of their election date and their Kansas roots are not all they have in common. Barack Obama came to the White House in January 2009 at an equally critical moment for the future of the United States and as leader of a party which has not been the dominant voice in shaping American foreign policy since Richard Nixon defeated Hubert Humphrey in the presidential election of 1968. One of Obama's principal tasks is to restore the Democratic Party's foreign policy consensus and demonstrate to the American public that Democrats have the ideas, leadership skills, and competence, particularly in the area of national security policy, to deal with the issues confronting the country.

Instilling confidence among Americans in his party's foreign policy competence and credibility requires that Obama articulate and implement diplomatic, military, and economic strategies, the ends of which attract broad-based support both at home and abroad, and the ways and means of which reflect the realities of a global economic crisis more profound than any since the 1930s. But 20 years after the end of the Cold War, defining a framework for Euro-Atlantic cooperation and implementing tasks to accomplish common purposes will be even more difficult than for leaders of the Atlantic alliance in the 1950s. The greatest difficulties, both conceptually and practically, will arise over strategies projecting, and possibly using, military force. Despite the departure of the Bush administration, it remains unclear whether there is a consensus within Europe on the desirability of cooperating with the United States on such strategies.

This editorial is a shortened and revised version of Dr. Edwina Campbell's chapter of the same name in *Die Aussenpolitik der USA: Präsident Obama's neuer Kurs und die Zukunft der transatlantischen Beziehungen* [*The Foreign Policy of the USA: President Obama's New Course and the Future of Transatlantic Relations*], ed. Reinhard Meier-Walser (Munich: Hanns-Seidel Stiftung, 2009).

Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

1. REPORT DATE	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED
2009		**00-00-2009 to 00-00-2009**

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
Obama's 'Eisenhower Moment'. American Strategic Choices and the Transatlantic Defense Relationship	5b. GRANT NUMBER
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S)	5d. PROJECT NUMBER
	5e. TASK NUMBER
	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) **Air University,Strategic Studies Quarterly,155 N. Twining Street, Building 693,Maxwell AFB ,AL,36112-6026**	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for public release; distribution unlimited

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES
see also ADA510198.

14. ABSTRACT

15. SUBJECT TERMS

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			
unclassified	**unclassified**	**unclassified**	**Same as Report (SAR)**	**5**	

A Second "New Look"

President Obama is taking a "new look"—as did Eisenhower—at the defense policies of the previous administration. While every administration claims to do this, in fact, since 1953, none of them have—not George H. W. Bush in 1989 nor Bill Clinton in 1993—despite the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. American presidents have reshaped and refocused specific policies, strategies, departments, and decision-making processes over the years, but changed none of the basic national security legacy created by the Truman and Eisenhower administrations from 1945 to 1961. Obama's presidency is the first to do so, and in a context analogous in three ways to that of 1953.

First, Obama's presidency is the first transition in the White House from one party to the other since 9/11. The president faces the same situation as Eisenhower did in 1953: he cannot draw on the extensive experience of a wide variety of American administrations in dealing with the threats of today. *His* grand strategies and their implementation will be as critical to defining approaches to the war on terror in the twenty-first century as Eisenhower's were to the Cold War.

As a result, President Obama will have the same impact on the structures and policies he inherited from George Bush as Eisenhower did on Truman's, deciding what survives—and what does not. The Defense Department and other decision-making reorganizations that began with the 1947 National Security Act were also a work in progress in the early 1950s. It was not until Eisenhower's embrace of the alliances, aid programs, and structures established by the Truman administration (including the CIA, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and National Security Council) that their survival into the future became clear.

Finally, Obama is inheriting a transformed military force from George Bush, a transformation driven by the failures of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. As a result of the changes made since 2005 to American armed forces, today they bear little resemblance to the stereotype that still exists abroad. They are no longer a force highly skilled at major combat operations with maximum lethal force but lacking the will and capability for anything else. Their transformation rivals that of the years 1950–53 and in many ways surpasses it. Obama is commander in chief of a force that has a different attitude toward war, conflict, and the overall operational environment than it did in 2001, one that in 2009 is reforming its education and training to become, as stated in Army Field Manual 3-24,

Counterinsurgency, an even more "flexible, adaptive force led by agile, well-informed, culturally astute leaders." The president's retention of Secretary of Defense Gates at the Pentagon suggests he recognizes the transformation is desirable and well underway, but not yet complete.

The Three Ps: Prosperity, Presence, Partnership

Obama's Eisenhower moment in 2009 has the same three dimensions as did Ike's in 1953: prosperity, presence, and partnership. Eisenhower dealt with each dimension, and each has become part of the national security debate in every administration since Truman's: *prosperity*—to make possible the desired investment in defense; *presence*—the deployment of US forces overseas; and *partnership*—American defense cooperation with other countries. The context in which Obama will deal with presence and partnership is strikingly similar to that of 1953; but where prosperity is concerned, it is very different.

Unlike Eisenhower, President Obama on his inauguration day faced the greatest global economic crisis of any American president since Franklin Roosevelt in 1933. The immediate future of American prosperity is seriously in doubt and will have consequences for the administration's ability to maintain or expand short- and long-term expenditures on defense. Long-term expenditures may fare better since they may double as domestic investments in infrastructure (as did Eisenhower's national highway program in the 1950s) and manufacturing, but monies destined to be spent outside the United States where no American jobs are created are likely to be scarce. Obama will be faced with tough choices, akin to those that confronted the United Kingdom after World War I: like Britain then, the United States today has extensive global defense commitments, a shrinking domestic revenue base, indebtedness to foreign powers, and a competitor for global fiscal primacy with no such global commitments—the European Union.

In the economic boom of the 1950s, "guns and butter" were not mutually exclusive, and except for brief, passing moments, they never have been for the United States, until now. Obama is the first president whose defense priorities and national security commitments will of necessity reflect the twin pressures on the federal budget from declining revenues and expanding domestic job creation and social service programs. But how will the financial crisis affect American strategic choices? No one, least of all the president, can be sure; there is no reference point in American history

to which he can turn. The last global economic crisis of this magnitude came when the United States embraced isolationism and was hardly one of the great military powers. The country then played an entirely different geostrategic role in the world.

If there is any parallel to the decision-making climate facing President Obama in 2009, it is not in the American past, but in mid-century Britain's. First, in the interwar years, and then more starkly after World War II, London faced the reality of a lack of economic means to meet its global defense commitments. The mid-century British analogy is not a happy one for the United States today, although there are doubtless skeptics of American foreign policy who feel otherwise. For them, declining American prosperity may seem the ideal solution to the "problem" of the United States' global role, whether they are American isolationists who feel that ungrateful foreigners have for decades exploited a surfeit of American power or critics overseas who feel exploited by a surfeit of American power. Any rejoicing at home or celebrating abroad is ill placed, however, particularly in Europe. Even under the most favorable economic circumstances, the Obama administration in its first year would have reviewed the state of presence and partnership—eight years after 9/11. In the context of the current economic crisis, the next *Quadrennial Defense Review* will raise questions about how and where to apply scarce US defense resources and, inevitably, about the relevance of Europe's defense resources, capabilities, and will.

American Presence, Regional Partnership

Since the end of the Cold War, and particularly since 9/11, the concept of American military presence as a catalyst for regional partnerships has emerged as a key element in the American approach to promoting stability and security in historically unstable and insecure parts of the world—as Europe once was. Since 2005, support to SSTR—stability, security, transition, and reconstruction—has been a priority for the US military, but there is little evidence that these changes in the US armed forces now under the command of Barack Obama are appreciated—or known at all—in Europe.

The Obama administration expects a greater European military role in counterinsurgency (COIN) as well as SSTR missions in Afghanistan. Vice President Biden said at the Munich Security Conference in February 2009, "We will ask our allies to rethink some of their own approaches—including

their willingness to use force when all else fails." Is such a greater European role likely? The prospects are not good, and American skepticism is not new: Eisenhower's secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, despaired of his European counterparts' approach to military force in 1953.

Today, although small pockets of European military experts recognize that the true "revolution in military affairs" in the United States is not the technological one of the 1990s but the human one that began in the past five years (with its emphasis on multilateral partnerships and support, rather than unilateral command, control, and execution), European political elites and public opinion do not want to recognize these changes. If they did, there would then be no reason to decline cooperation with Washington in developing a comprehensive strategy towards Afghanistan and, eventually, other countries. As he faces his Eisenhower moment, President Obama would be well advised to assume the absence of a robust transatlantic defense relationship in making American strategic choices in the months and years ahead.

EDWINA S. CAMPBELL, PhD
Professor of National Security
Air Command and Staff College