

Changes in American Foreign Policy from Obama to Trump Administration

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Abstract

Leaving behind the traditional isolationism policy, post World War II United States started to embrace a global engagement policy. The country has become an arbiter in the 'handmade' liberal global order with leading sanction powers. Subsequent to the significantly important process of Cold War, the US bears the super power role by defeating the Soviet Union which the US was in a long time competition with. Besides analyzing main principles and regions affecting and shaping the American foreign policy which tends to swing between interventionism and isolationism, this paper will discuss the glances and practices of policies determined by Obama and Trump administrations and look into the changing methods of these two different sides of America. The main purpose is to examine main focuses of foreign policy which consists mostly around four significantly important regions; Middle East, North Africa, Europe, China and Russia from the realist perspective with the belief that foreign policy affairs occurs around the idea of self-help element of realism. In 2008, Barack Obama appeared as a sunlight on the road to peace by calling Arabian communities to 'not to afraid of new changes' in his speech made in Cairo.¹ Obama speech left signs of fixing the distorted image of the US by transmitting Bush's 'hard power' policy to 'soft power' according to some scholars.² By the end of his presidency, Obama seem inconsistent in most of the foreign policy issues and with the belief of that Obama's 'soft power' policy and his unstable views and acts weekend the United States, with Donald Trump in the presidential seat all

bitter attitudes in his speeches were being considered as rough, dangerous and exclusionary.³

Introduction

As a significant turning point of the international world order after 9/11, Bush administration declared some of the countries of MENA region as 'rogue states' and potential threats. Afterwards there have been some important moves such as Afghanistan war and invasion of Iraq. In the Middle East and North Africa region in specific, around the world in general, the United States left a bad image by acting as an aggressor upon the significant actors of the region.

By the end of 2007 starting from Middle East, the American antagonism spreaded all over the world even in some European countries. According to some scholars, the US foreign policy tends to swing between interventionism and isolationism.

When Barack Obama came to the presidency he tried to find a stable and moderate middle ground.⁴ In both the speeches made by Obama in Egypt and Turkey, he emphasized the importance of peaceful relations with the Islamic world and effects of this kind of integration all around the world. He asserted that this bad image of America must be changed immediately by using 'soft power' in the foreign policy. Thus, President Donald Trump alleged the same approach that deteriorated power of the country should be fixed in the way of any certain policies and acts.

1. Kaplan Fred, "Report of Obama's Foreign Policy", January 4, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/gorus/obamanin-dis-politika-karnesi>

2. Cord Roskin, Jones Medeiros, Political Science – an introduction, 12th Edition, Pearson Education, United States, 2012, p.346

3. Appadurai Arjun, "Tiredness of Democracy", Büyük Gerileme, Heinrich Geiselberger(prep) ,Berlin, April 2017,

4. Cord Roskin, Jones Medeiros, Political Science – an introduction, 12th Edition, Pearson Education, United States, 2012, p.346

Foreign Policy of Obama Administration

Starting from the election campaigns, Barack Obama stated the importance of human rights and democracy nearly in every speech. These approaches to the global realistic order expected to be held as an example to implement in Middle East and North Africa region as well as other problematic parts of the world. Instead of carrying on Bush administration's policy of taking democracy to the needy Islamic countries, Obama preferred establishing peaceful relations with the regional states under the banner of mutual respect. By avoiding using hard power in internal and external affairs Obama administration opted building diplomacy-based relations with strategic actors.⁵

First of all, Obama set out the policies in direction of withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan. Obama administration aimed at refinement available relations with allies such as Turkey and Israel.⁶ As opposition to Bush's unilateralism and aggression, he created a different atmosphere by his multilateral approach to local and global issues. Obama's foreign policy principles of building various cooperation and dialogues intended to fix the broken relations with China and Russia.⁷

To its traditional allies in Europe, Obama aimed to develop cooperations on multiple floors. To its traditional allies in Europe, Obama aimed to develop cooperation on multiple floors. Besides, one of the primary rhetoric of Obama was to determine policies in order to prevent nuclear and other dangerous weapons around the world and to build security infrastructures. In general, what Obama pursued to

establish was smooth policy view in both political and economic levels.⁸

In early days of Obama in the office, he pointed out that his main foreign policy goals consists of preventing global hunger, global warming and building security infrastructures, constructing multilateral cooperation to stop nuclear and other dangerous weapons. Instead of focusing more on the economic and political issues and taking aggressive attitude, he preferred to focus more on resolving the conflicts by dialogues, promoting freedom of speech, equal rights for women, and by highlighting the importance of law and justice. From economic point of view, Obama blamed the policies of investing in military and continuation of the Iraq and Afghan invasions as the cause of the economic worsening. In order to ameliorate consequences of the economic crisis of 2008, Obama administration aimed not to invest much on military equipment.

Notwithstanding, there was a strengthened China in Asia-Pacific and with the aim of not to lose power in region he wanted to follow an active and stabilizer policy. There have also been some diplomatic and economic policies adopted in this way but while stating the importance of not to focus more on military equipment Obama administration changed policies in a way when it was realized the unstoppable development of China and its reinforced military bases in the Pacific. On the economic and trade side they supported the Trans-Pacific Partnership with the belief in it's a high quality trade and investment platform. Obama administration was becoming aware of the fact that America's future economic prosperity was mostly connected to Asia region and there may be a possibility of shifted focus from Middle East to Asia.

5. Öztürk Ersoy Tuğçe, "Reconstruction of American Foreign Policy Through Obama Image", TASAM, July 2009, http://www.tasam.org/tr-TR/Icerik/1102/barack_obama_imaji_uzerinden_amerikan_dis_politikasinin_yeniden_insasi

6. Kardaş Şaban, Obama's Heritage and Trump US Foreign Policy, Discussion Program, January 21, 2017, ORSAM

7. Prof. Dr. Ateşoğlu Güney Nurşin, Clinton-Obama'nın Reddedilen Dış Politika Mirası, BILGESAM, Kasım 2016, <http://>

www.bilgesam.org/incele/2552/-clinton-obama'nin-reddedilen-dis-politika-mirasi/#.WSKvWYyLTIV

8. Ermağan İsmail, Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Dönemde ABD Dış Politikası - Obama Dönemi ve Ak Parti, Elektronik Siyaset Bilimi Araştırmaları Dergisi, Haziran 2012, Cilt: 3, Sayı:2

On the other side, Obama administration believed that the relations between Russia and the United States should be improved and acted indulgently on related the issues. In the first half of his presidency, Obama required cooperation principle with Moscow and he called this policy as 'reset policy' which was planned to correct the deteriorating relations in the Bush period.

But soon after, Obama couldn't see any future to this approach due to the fact that Russia was turning this to an advantage for its own sake. Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014 and military interventions to the Syrian conflict since 2015 wasn't seen as a surprise. The deployment of Russian troops and war machines in the Middle East and Black Sea regions disturbed American allies in Europe. In order to relieve allies against those acts of Putin, Obama administration was stuck in a tough situation and had to increase the armament in the region. Sanctions against Russia along with the European allies on Ukraine issue, caused tension in bilateral relations between the two sides.

On the other hand, Middle East which is seen as an important geostrategic region with political, economic and cultural features, planned policies of Obama was in line with being able to prevent the expansionism of Iran at the beginning. Considering such an aim, the US supported the agreement between Iran and five permanent members of the UN and Germany in 2015. However, reluctant acts of the US in defending the democracy and multilateralism and inadequate support to the citizens of the region who want their fundamental rights during the Arabian Spring shows that the Obama administration didn't follow the way they set at the beginning.⁹

Obama condemned the persecution of Assad administration in Syria strongly, called for the change of regime. In case of using chemical weapons, he

warned Assad that the United States would intervene in the region if the red line was crossed by the regime.¹⁰ Despite the violations of all those warnings during the process there has been no intervention act by America. Because of his inadequate support during the Arabian revolts which started in Tunisia with spreading almost every Arabian state, dictatorships became stronger and chaos engulfed the region. That result brought the idea of an unsolved foreign policy issue.

Another important issue was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Obama administration supported the mutual land exchange policy and he declared that the US didn't accept 'the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements'. Obama and his administration were opposed to the illegal settlements of Israel in Palestinian lands. That policy can be count as a turning point in American long time foreign policy. Shortly after of this decision, Obama took strong reactions from Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu that is clearly opposed to a two-state solution.

Furthermore, the relationship with the traditional allies in Europe reduced to a larger extent and trade and investment cooperation faced hurdles, and disturbance emerged between these two main Western actors. Economic problems that some of the European countries had since 2008 effected the US economy in a negative way. Therefore, it was believed that there is some uncontrolled strategic regional partnership. American foreign policy on Middle East, Eastern Europe and actions that allowed control to pass to Russia in large disturbed the allies in Europe.

At the end of his presidency, Obama left an incomplete mission in Asia, unresolved issues and chaos in Middle East, remaining Israel-Palestine conflict, regression in economic growth, unstoppable nuclear forces and dissatisfied allies looking towards the new president Donald Trump.

9. Kanat Kılıç Buğra, "Obama'nın İkinci Döneminde Amerikan Dış Politikası", SETA Analiz, May 2014, No:93

10. Davutoğlu Ahmet, Obama'dan Trump'a: Çıkarılacak Dersler ve Karşılaşılacak Zorluklar, February 2, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/gorus/obamadan-trumpa-cikarilacak-der-sler-ve-karsilasilacak-zorluklar>

Donald Trump Administration

After the transmission policy of Obama from 'hard power' to 'soft power', Donald Trump became the 45th president of the United States and going back to the aggressive policy and emphasis on the 'hard power'. President Donald Trump caused great repercussions and controversies all around the world with his aggressive image and speeches. President Trump argued that Russia is becoming a great power, countries like China, India appeared as super powers in Asia, Iran showed expansionist policies in the Middle East and therefore America lost its global power. During the election campaign he gave the clue to the world that there will be fundamental changes in both internal and external policies under his presidency. It was obvious that Trump was favorable to Israel and praised Putin's Russia many times. Through social media he made harsh discourses against China. While his speech with the expression of 'America First' gave the world clue of an exclusionary image and the view that he will act according to the realist ideology in terms of foreign policy.¹¹

Trump continued to display unilateral and conservative policies with both his speeches and implementations. On a large scale, policy views of Donald Trump are shaping around the anti-globalization view. He argues that globalization has lost strength and tolerance and dialogue-oriented policies made other regional powers more active and powerful. In terms of foreign policy, President Trump claimed the strategic importance of Eastern Asia, Gulf and Europe.

Unlike Obama, Trump administration supported military operations overseas. He started to reconsider some of the global economic or political cooperation

and treaties developed during Obama administration. He thinks that cooperation is causing decrease in wealth and prestige. By implementing certain policies he tried to regain political and economic strength of America. Because of uncontrolled global cooperation and treaties, foreign investments, international trade and finance, labor movements and migration affairs he asserted that the military superiority and economic growth of the United States are in a decline and they need radical changes. He seems consistent to this aim with his practices from the very first day in office. Through cultural purification inside, he aims to be an isolated global power again. He blames Islamic religion directly for global terrorism.¹² By the policies of Trump to remove this situation from global order we can witness that they are sharply separated from Obama's policies.¹³

In the early days of his presidency he banned the entry of seven Muslim populated counties' citizens into the US. He showed a stiff attitude to the refugees especially to the Muslims migrating to the West. Trump administration built regional cooperation in order to create security zones in Syria and get rid of migration affair. Trump administration's military steps in Middle East and military support to the Democratic Forces of Syria and YPG in their combat with ISIS overland also proved that he wanted to take the war to enemy's lands.

Although the Kurdish people supported Trump as the President of the United States with the belief of taking advantage during their struggle for independence¹⁴, which did not prove to be the case as Trump administration abandoned the community after they were used to serve the US and allies' interests. According to researchers, Trump administration cleverly avoided long-term alliances in the Arabian region.

11. Kardaş Şaban, American Foreign Policy of Trump Administration and Turkey, *Ortadoğu Analiz Dergisi*, January-February 2017, Vol:9 No: 78

12. Appadurai Arjun, "Tiredness of Democracy", *Büyük Gerileme*, Heinrich Geiselberger (prep), Berlin, April 2017

13. Akdoğan İsmail, "Possible Foreign Policy of Donald Trump in Middle East and Gulf States" *Ortadoğu Analiz*, January-February 2017, Vol:9 No:78

14. Robin Wright, "President Trump's Surprisingly Warm Welcome in the Middle East" *The New Yorker*, 10.11.2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/president-trumps-surprisingly-warm-welcome-in-the-middle-east>

Donald Trump also asserted that the United States will be ready to cooperate with Russia in order to put an end to ISIS.¹⁵ Acting together with Russia, Trump and Putin both think that a more stable environment will be achieved in the region. What Trump seeks is to ameliorate the deteriorated relations with the regional allies especially with Israel. He aims to give priority to Israel which was abandoned during Obama administration. As a matter of fact, Israel has been most satisfied with President Trump. On the contrary to Israel, tension in bilateral relations with Iran in this new period seems to be dominant one. An important reason of Trump targeting the region was termination of the nuclear agreement which was signed in 2015 with Iran and that seriously disturbed Iran. Moreover, Trump continued to criticize the policies of Obama administration claiming that the uncertain acts in the region made Iran stronger.¹⁶

Similar to Obama administration, China stands into the center of foreign policy vision of Trump and his team. They see China as the biggest threat to America in economic and political arena in new world order. It's increasing development in Asia, China got enough time and leverage to gain economic power in advancing military presence and today it constitutes one of the main elements of American foreign policy. The relationship of these two states which will continue in the new term will have considerable effects on the global order. In this context Russia appears as a significant ally for the US in Asia- Pacific region against possible Chinese hegemony.¹⁷

Trump, who hasn't claimed anything unfavorable about Putin or Russia, believes that many problems worldwide can be solved by acting together. Most of their views intersect at a common point. Both

the American and Russian leaders believe that there are many opportunities to cooperate when looking from the realist perspective of international relations. Both sides believe that the positive atmosphere in bilateral relations will be mutually beneficial. In terms of foreign policy, they both assert that the most critical security issue that the world faces is the global terrorism originating from the Middle East. Furthermore, the Trump administration believes that Russia would be a balance factor against China's rising power in Asia.

Throughout his campaign Donald Trump supported a policy of decreasing other countries' reliance on the policies of the U.S. He entails reducing foreign economic and military commitments with some of the allies in Europe. He considers European Union as a threat to American economy and military power. Thus he supported Brexit and remains sympathetic to populist parties of other EU members. The foreign policy set by the Trump administration was to reduce traditional European support in this context. Otherwise, a possible closeness between United States and Russia would affect the relations with Europe. The Trump administration also took some significant steps on geostrategic regions with regional allies such as Turkey. The politics determined at the point of struggle against terrorism (ISIS, PKK) and the crisis of Syria will be ensuring the security of Turkey and consolidate relations with Ankara.

Conclusion

The analysis suggests that the foreign policy is a difficult area of governance because of the facts of abilities and preferences and many states involvement. It is necessary to consider that the global order and

15. Prof. Dr. Ali Othman, "Middle East Policy of Donald Trump and Kurds", ORSAM Bölgesel Gelişmeler Değerlendirmesi, December 2016, No: 55

16. (ibid)

17. Kösebalaban Hasan, "Will Trump Change the American Foreign Policy?", January 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/gorus/trump-amerikan-dis-politikasini-degistirebilecek-mi>

positions of actors in it change continuously over time. This change can sometimes be shaped by the attitudes of state officials.¹⁸ Therefore, governors can make some mistakes which are conceptualized in the discipline of international relations such as misperception that some analysts claim Obama had during his administration.¹⁹

Some critics believe that Obama should have foreseen that there would be consequences of refrain of using military power. Primary result emerging with the paper is that the administration of Obama removed American antagonism with his perceived idealist and peaceful perspective. Therewithal, a perception appeared that his promise to restore old economic and political strength didn't succeed. Obama and his team criticized in two specific places; failure to bring an effective solution to the crisis of Syria and failure to provide strength in Eastern Europe.

The period when Trump took over the presidential task was of crucial importance because of unstable and chaotic situation in the Middle East, as well as competition of hegemonic powers in Asia. In this critical global environment Trump administration emphasized on the importance of improving relations with existing allies and obtainment of new ones by acting according to real-political views. In this context, Trump and his team stressed on strengthening economic and defence power of the United States with permanent solutions to crisis in Middle East and to migration affair instead of wasting too much time there.

Trump's harsh speeches about refugees migrating to the West and other different identities sharply separate him from Obama. By creating a new wave of protectionism in foreign policy he wants an isolated

and strong America in global scale again which can be claimed resembling to the Pre-World War II America.

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18. Akbaş Zafer, "The Sustainability of the USA Policy and Power Struggle in the Middle East", History Studies Journal, USA, 2011

19. Cord Roskin, Jones Medeiros, Political Science – an introduction, 12th Edition, Pearson Education, United States, 2012, p.346

20. Kardaş Şaban, American Foreign Policy of Trump Administration and Turkey, Ortadoğu Analiz Dergisi, January-February 2017, Vol:9 No: 78