

Shifting horizons

America and the world Those who will shape foreign policy under Obama are, to judge by their backgrounds and writings, anxious to rethink US power and to bond with Europe, writes **Gideon Rachman**

European policymakers will this weekend be able to have their first close look at the foreign policy team of President Barack Obama. The American delegation to the annual Munich security conference will be led by Joe Biden, US vice-president, and will include General James Jones, Mr Obama's new national security adviser.

But for those searching for clues to the "new" administration's approach to the rest of the world, there is a treasure trove of evidence that has been little examined - the writings of the people who will shape foreign policy.

Several are prolific authors. Many are moving across Washington, from venerable think-tanks such as the Brookings Institution on Massachusetts Avenue, into offices in the state department or at the White House. Others are arriving from universities including Harvard, Princeton and Stanford.

It would be naive to assume that ideas floated in journal articles will be translated directly into US foreign policy. The real world is too messy for that. But the writings of the appointees and those likely to serve alongside them at least illustrate the intellectual climate and help identify some of their underlying assumptions.

Out goes the "war on terror" which the new brood sees as an ideological rather than a military struggle. In comes a need to reappraise both America's power and its vulnerabilities.

THE NEW BROOD

- Six themes emerge from writings of those who will shape foreign policy:
- The war on terror needs to be reconsidered.
 - The US must rethink its ideas both about power and about threats.
 - America should intervene to prevent humanitarian disasters.
 - Belief in the UN is firm.
 - Diplomacy is back in fashion.
 - Old Europe is back too.



Eight to watch in US foreign policy

Back are a belief in the importance of the United Nations, of diplomacy in general - with a new stress on broad-based regional initiatives - and of relations with allies in western Europe.

Since the "war on terror" was the organising principle of the foreign policy of George W. Bush, it is not surprising that the Obama team is urging a re-think. The early decision to close the prison at Guantanamo Bay reflected a belief that the struggle with terrorism is as much about ideas and principles as it is about military force. Daniel Benjamin, a Brookings scholar who is expected to take up a senior state department position dealing with counterterrorism, has argued that terrorism is never likely to be definitively vanquished. Rather, it is a threat that needs to be "managed and reduced".

In the same vein, Philip Gordon - also of Brookings and expected to take up the post of assistant secretary of state for Europe - argues that "the battle against Islamist terrorism will be won when the ideology that underpins it loses its appeal".

This rethinking of the war on terror reflects a broader reassessment, both of American power and of US national security. Rather than putting military power at the centre of US foreign policy, the Obama team wants to rehabilitate America's "soft power" - diplomacy, persuasion, cultural influence, development aid and the power of example. Indeed, the man who coined the phrase "soft power" - Joseph Nye, a Harvard professor - is tipped to be US ambassador to Japan or China.

Anne-Marie Slaughter, a Princeton academic, is expected to be appointed head of policy planning at the state department - a job once held by George Kennan, architect of the policy of containment of the Soviet Union.

Richard Holbrooke
Special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan; favours a broad regional approach

Daniel Benjamin
Brookings scholar; expected to take up a state department counter-terrorism position

Samantha Power
Author of *A Problem from Hell*; tipped for a top position at National Security Council

Kurt Campbell
Likely assistant secretary of state for Asia; sees climate change as a security threat

Ivo Daalder
Expected to be the US ambassador to NATO; has proposed the formation of a "Global NATO"

Susan Rice
The new ambassador to UN; thinks extreme poverty leads to state failure

Philip Gordon
Brookings scholar; expected to take up the post of assistant secretary of state for Europe

Anne-Marie Slaughter
Academic tipped as head of policy planning at the state department

Ms Slaughter is keen to get away from the militarised and Maitchman world view of the Bush years. In a recent article, she suggests that the US "need not see itself as locked in a global struggle with other great powers; rather it should view itself as a central player in an integrated world". In her view, American power is as much to do with a dense web of cultural and economic connections with the rest of the world as it is to do with the number of aircraft carriers possessed by the navy.

But while the thinkers around Mr Obama have played down traditional threats to national security, they are keen that the administration should take a new generation of threats much more seriously. Kurt Campbell, expected to become assistant secretary of state for Asia, argues that some "unchecked climate change will come to represent perhaps the single greatest risk to our national security". Susan Rice, the new ambassador to the UN, thinks extreme poverty leads to state failure and, therefore, "we ignore or obscure the implications of global pov-

erty for global security at our peril". Some of Mr Obama's early state-department suggestions that the Bush administration occasionally Messianic view of "democracy promotion" as a central priority of US foreign policy, may now be quietly shelved (see below). But this is one area in which there is likely to be considerable debate and disagreement within the Obama camp. Some of the new president's appointees can sound just as ardent about democracy promotion as any neo-conservative.

Michael McFaul, a Stanford academic in the Russia desk at the National Security Council, for example argued in the Policy Review in 2002: "The US must once again become a revisionist power... The ultimate purpose of an international community of democratic states that encompasses every region of the planet".

Although the idea of creating a League of Democracies as an alternative source of legitimacy to the UN became closely associated with John

'We ignore or obscure the implications of global poverty for security at our peril'

McCain's Republican presidential campaign, it is also a notion with which some Obama advisers have played around. Ivo Daalder, who is likely to become US ambassador to NATO, has proposed the formation of a "Global NATO" - an idea that might raise a few eyebrows among fellow ambassadors in Brussels. Mr Daalder's argument is that because the alliance now takes on global missions, most obviously in Afghanistan, it should "open its membership to any democratic state in the world that is willing and able to contribute to the fulfilment of NATO's new responsibilities".

Although Mr Obama opposed the Iraq war, members of his foreign policy team are not against the expansive use of American power. Samantha Power, who is expected to take a top position in the National Security Council, came to Mr Obama's attention when he read her book, *A Problem from Hell*, which criticised American passivity in the face of genocide, from Cambodia to

Rwanda. She is a firm believer in the use of US power to achieve humanitarian aims and stop future genocides.

A belief in liberal interventionism and the promotion of democracy is not at odds with the neo-conservative world view. Where the Obama camp often departs decisively from the Bush years is in the belief in the importance of the UN. Ms Power's second book, *Chasing the Flame*, was an admiring biography of a UN official killed in a terrorist attack in Iraq. The book's belief in the world body as a force for good is a departure from the hostility and scepticism of the Bush years.

At the NSC, Ms Power is expected to be given a portfolio dealing with global governance. Her counterpart at the state department will probably be Carlos Pascual of the Brookings Institution, another firm supporter of the UN. He has argued for beefing up its peace-keeping capabilities.

Many of these arguments are in the realm of grand theory. But Mr Obama's people have also written extensively about the knotty diplomatic problems that they are already confronting. Richard Holbrooke, who has been appointed special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, has made it clear that he favours a broad regional approach to the "problem". In a recent article for *Foreign Affairs*, he argued that Afghanistan should be seen as part of an "arc of crisis" stretching from Turkey through Iraq, Iran and Pakistan.

The Obama team's preference for a regional approach may also be demonstrated in the Middle East, where the Israeli/Palestinian question is likely to be tackled as part of a package of linked problems including countries such as Syria, Lebanon and Iran.

The voluminous writings of team appointees will approach things. But there are also cultural nuances that are not captured in journal articles or conference speeches. While many of the Bush team hailed from the south and the Midwest, many Obama appointees have cultural ties to Europe.

Several - including Ms Rice and Mr McFaul - studied at Oxford as Rhodes scholars. Mr Daalder was born in the Netherlands and Ms Power in Ireland. Mr Gordon was the official translator of French president Nicolas Sarkozy's biography. Ms Slaughter has a Belgian mother. The *piere* de resistance: Gen Jones, the new national security adviser, speaks fluent French, having gone to high school in France. Old Europe is likely to receive a cordial welcome in Mr Obama's Washington.

Clinton signals a smart retreat from democratisation

administration, which threw everything out that had to do with [former president Bill] Clinton". Mrs Clinton's "three D's" mantra rather than charting grand objectives. It suggests that the US will continue to assert its military might while emphasising the kind of diplomatic outreach many US allies called for during Mr Bush's presidency. The secretary of state also wants to use US aid to put pressure on countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan and to win control of assistance currently dispensed by the US military so that it can be more easily put to the service of political goals.

In a phrase Mrs Clinton has borrowed from Joseph Nye a Harvard professor, and Richard Armitage, a former Bush administration state department official, she labels such an alliance of "hard" and "soft" power as "smart".

Three pillars: Hillary Clinton, US secretary of state

Taking questions from staff at the state department this week, Hillary Clinton highlighted the hard-headed approach she hopes to take to the US's relations with the rest of the world. "When we talk about the three pillars of American foreign policy - defence, diplomacy, development - they're not just words to the president and me," the new secretary of state declared, repeating a formula she has used several times in the days since she took office.

Singularly absent from her outline of the struts of US foreign policy is a fourth "D" - democracy promotion - a goal that served as one of the guiding themes of the Bush administration. The Obama administration has gone out of its way to signal a pragmatic, non-ideological approach. It is a modus operandi that stresses continuity with policy under George W. Bush in terms of the tools it uses while setting out arguably more "realistic" goals.

"This team is very deliberate and what you'll see is them taking a long look at what they've inherited to see what that works," says a US official. "They have learnt the lesson from the beginning of the Bush

power". Her stance is bolstered by similar positions struck by President Barack Obama and Robert Gates, defence secretary - a veteran champion of "realism" in the long-running Washington debate with liberal interventionist "idealists".

Not for nothing did Mr Obama promise to work with authoritarian states in his inaugural address. While Mr Bush used his second inauguration to set out "the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world", Mr Obama told underdeveloped states that "we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist" - an offer he later explicitly addressed to Iran.

Indeed, just days before taking office, the then president-elect took care to avoid Mr Bush's emphasis on free elections by talking about "democratic institutions" - a phrase that also fits the liberal interventionist mantra of "democracy promotion".

Afghanistan to reduce the threat of terrorism rather than on establishing a US-style " Jeffersonian democracy". Clinton has labelled "essential" and similar discussions on Iran. "Where continuity is appropriate, we are committed to doing that," Mrs Clinton said, also instructing Todd Stern, her climate change envoy, to take part in both "United Nations negotiations and processes involving a smaller set of countries" - an apparent reference to Mr Bush's controversial "major emitters" grouping.

"From Iran to the plans for an early meeting with Russian president Dmitry Medvedev to recent statements on Afghanistan, there is a strong realist strain appearing, although whether that will hold sway at the end of the day remains to be seen," says Cliff Kupchan, a Washington-based analyst and former Clinton administration official. While the debate between realists and idealists that rocked the Bush administration continues, Mr Kupchan observes that now "the portions of meat and vegetables are different".

Other instruments established by

Mr Bush and set to continue include the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear programme, which Mrs Clinton has labelled "essential", and similar discussions on Iran. "Where continuity is appropriate, we are committed to doing that," Mrs Clinton said, also instructing Todd Stern, her climate change envoy, to take part in both "United Nations negotiations and processes involving a smaller set of countries" - an apparent reference to Mr Bush's controversial "major emitters" grouping.

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Daniel Dombey and Demetri Sevastopulo