

The 2016 American Presidential Elections

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The American presidential elections, which are held every four years, will take place this time on November 8, 2016 to elect a new president to lead the United States and define its national security interests. Two candidates with different backgrounds and worldviews will be competing for the job. A candidate representing the Democratic, which is expected to be Hilary Clinton, and a candidate representing the Republican Party, which is likely to be Donald Trump. While a new president who comes after an old president of his own party usually makes minor changes in policies, he or she seldom makes drastic ones; a republican president that follows a democratic president usually makes drastic changes that affect America's policies and how it is viewed in the world. This requires substantial changes in personnel, institutional arrangements and rhetoric. Will the new president be able to change things and reorder American priorities to correspond to his vision? I do not believe so. While change will be introduced, the outcome will be neither drastic nor comprehensive to make a big difference in state policies or politics or standing in the world.

The experience of the last fifty years has demonstrated that presidents tend to talk about change and new priorities, and articulate different views and programs for change during election campaigns in order to win the public opinion and improve their chances for getting elected; they often make apparently clear that their approach to domestic social and economic issues, security matters, international relations, environmental and energy policies, and education concerns are drastically different from their predecessors. But because the US has been a great superpower with security and economic interests everywhere in the world, no administration has ever been able to overhaul old policies or institute new ones that contradict the conventional wisdom prevalent in Washington. The US Congress, the American media, and the many lobbies have acted as guardians protecting domestic and international programs and policies that serve their interests and promote their cultural values. This means that most elections have become largely meaningless. Commenting on this sad fact, the Washington Post once said: voting is a national duty, but change is not possible.

Foreign political analysts in general tend to think that domestic and international policies differ from one another because they are based on different assumptions and cater to different voters. While this view is largely true in most democratic states; it is not true in the United States. The US political system and constitution have made both policies interlinked and thus inseparable. In fact, US foreign policy has almost always been an extension of domestic policy. Meanwhile, the advancement of economic globalization and increased US dependence on foreign investment capital and imported oil and consumer products, have made policymaking and policy implementation very complicated. The financial crisis that engulfed the United States in 2008 proves that domestic and foreign policies are interlinked, and that the economy is a major national and international security issue that concerns Americans.

Though it is widely believed that the US national interest is the organizing principle of the American national policy; and thus it governs the country's international agenda and approach to international relations and global security concerns, things have never been this simple. In the wake of the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the demise of Marxism, it became very difficult to define the American national interest in clear terms that enjoy the support of the ruling political, military, economic, and intellectual and media elites in America. The September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the US failure to win the war in Afghanistan or Iraq or on terrorism, have eliminated all possibilities to reach consensus regarding US national interest. Meanwhile, the reemergence of Russia as a major economic and military power, the rise of China and India as global economic powers, the consolidation of Europe as an economic and political power house, and the financial meltdown of Wall Street in September 2008 have made any attempt to define America's national or security interests in clear terms an exercise in futility. As a consequence, no drastic changes are expected from the new elections, no matter who wins in 2016.

The magnitude of the security, military, economic, financial and political problems facing America today make it impossible to articulate a list of achievable goals and translate them into workable policies programs that could protect the "national interest." Only racist ideology could come up with a vague list of unachievable goals that ignore reality as well as the interests and

rights of other nations and American minorities. While some people in American think that fighting "terrorism" is the major national security issue on the times; others consider the revival of the American economy and the narrowing of the wealth and income gaps between rich and poor are the most important national goals. Still others think that the new Russian posture and regional designs, and China's continued economic growth represent the most serious security challenge facing the United States and its allies in this century. But regardless of what members of Congress, the White house, the media, and the captains of the sinking ship of capitalism might think, and what the presidential candidates might say, the United States is today in a mess, and no one knows how fix it.

In view of the American relative economic decline and mounting public debt, the new president will have few options and resources available to him to initiate new social or military programs that could have a major impact on the lives of poor Americans or the future of other nations. Therefore, whoever gets elected at the end of this year will have to recognize that the United States of America is an empire in decline, a diminished superpower in no position to dominate the world as before. A democratic president is more able to recognize this fact and act accordingly; while a republican president is less likely to accept such a verdict and therefore is more likely to conduct a policy based on illusions and outdated ideological ideas and insane adventures that hurt everyone and serve the interests of no one. The emerging new world order will not be based on one superpower acting alone, but on a few great powers competing for political influence and economic advantage.

Though America's view of security interests is expected to change after the elections, the US policy toward the Middle East is less likely to experience any noticeable change. It is a policy that had become an article of political faith, and therefore no one dares to change it or even raise doubts about its utility. Such a policy has the following objectives:

1. Protecting the security of Israel and supporting its policies and maintaining its military edge over all neighboring Arab states;

2. Guaranteeing American access to the energy resources of the Arabian Gulf states and securing the free flow of oil supplies to the West;
3. Preventing the emergence of a regional power capable of dominating its neighbors or threatening American interests in the region; and
4. Fighting international terrorism.