Barack Obama: A New Precedent in Foreign Policy?

A study of presidential agency in US foreign policy

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Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts (International Studies) at the
University of Stellenbosch

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March 2011

Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis aims to measure President Barack Obama's level of presidential agency in foreign policy, in order to determine whether he will be able to achieve his ambitious goal of renewing US leadership in foreign affairs. To do so, this thesis will make use of a two-level analysis: The primary level of analysis will focus on the *office of the president,* and the constitutionally determined formal powers it confers on the president. It will also study the constraints placed on the president by the powers conferred on other branches of government, as well as the institutional and societal context in which the president must function. The second level of analysis will focus on the *president as an individual,* and the role that a number of personality traits and informal powers play in presidential agency. The central hypothesis of this thesis is that while all presidents are exposed to roughly the same set of institutional constraints, an individual president's level of agency depends on their utilisation of a number of informal powers. In order to measure this hypothesis, a five-point framework will be developed by abstracting from the existing literature on informal powers. This framework will consist of five criteria believed to be a prerequisite for a high degree of presidential agency: (1) a favourable disposition to foreign affairs; (2) the ability to provide strong leadership in policy formulation; (3) a command over Pennsylvania Avenue politics; (4) the utilisation of the role of public opinion maker; (5) and the utilisation of the role of global statesmen. While Obama will be shown to do well against the framework, his lack of tangible accomplishments will be shown to stem from the magnitude of the challenges he faces; the larger foreign policy context in which he came to office; and the deep-seated distrust of the motives underlying US foreign policy in certain regions. Furthermore, the time constraints he faces, and the impact of the election cycle, will be identified as a limit to the pace of implementation and the extent of the changes he is able to make.

Opsomming

Die doel van hierdie tesis is om President Barack Obama se vlak van presidensiële agentskap in buitelandse beleid te meet om te bepaal of hy sy ambisieuse doelwit om die VSA se leierskap in buitelandse sake te hernu, sal bereik. 'n Tweevlakkige analise sal vir hierdie doel aangewend word. Die analise sal op 'n primêre vlak fokus op die *president as ampsdraer,* en die formele magte wat deur die grondwet aan hom toegeken word. Dit sal ook die beperkinge wat op die president geplaas word as gevolg van die magte wat aan die ander takke van die regering toegeken word, bestudeer. Verder sal die institusionele en maatskaplike konteks waarin die president moet fuksioneer in ag geneem word. Die tweede vlak van analise sal op die *president as individu* fokus, en die rol wat sekere informele magte en persoonlikheidseienskappe in presidensiële agentskap speel. Die sentrale hipotese van hierdie tesis, is dat alhoewel alle presidente deur dieselfde institusionele beperkinge geaffekteer word, 'n spesifieke president se vlak van agentskap afhang van sy gebruik van informele magte. Hierdie hipotese sal gemeet woord deur 'n vyfpuntraamwerk te ontwikkel wat gebruik maak van die bestaande literatuur op presidensiële agentskap. Dié raamwerk bestaan uit vyf kriteria wat benodig word om 'n hoë vlak van agentskap te handhaaf: (1) 'n positiewe gesindheid teenoor buitelandse sake; (2) die vermoë om sterk leierskap in die beleidsformuleringsproses uit te oefen; (3) meesterskap oor *Pennsyvanie Avenue* politiek; (4) die gebruik van die rol van openbare 'n opinie maker; (5) en die gebruik van die rol van 'n globale staatsman. Die tesis sal wys dat alhoewel Obama suksesvol is wanneer hy teen die raamwerk gemeet word, sy tekort aan prestasies toegeskryf kan word aan die omvang van die probleme wat hy moet oplos; die groter buitelandse konteks waarin hy verkies is; en die wantroue in die VSA se onderliggende motiewe in sekere streke. Verder sal die tydsbeperkinge op sy presidentskap en die impak van die verkiesingsiklus geïdentifiseer word as 'n bepreking op die spoed waarteen hy veranderinge kan implementeer.

Acknowledgments

Prof Anthony Leysens, who first exposed me to the integrated global political economy.

Prof Janis van der Westhuizen, who shaped my understanding of international relations theory.

Prof Amanda Gouws, who helped me to understand polling and the measurement of American public opinion.

Prof Patrick McGowan, who made me consider the shifts in the international power balance and the future of US leadership in a changing global order.

My good friends, Kobus Ehlers and Linsen Loots, with whom I have spent many hours debating Obama's hopes and shortcomings.

Finally, my supervisor, Dr Karen Smith. I am greatly appreciative of the formative role she has played in shaping my interest in US foreign policy and the US political system. Without her positivity, invaluable guidance and encouragement, this thesis would not have been possible.

Contents

Acronyms and Abbreviations

9/11   Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001

COP15   2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference

ESS   European Security Strategy

G8   The Group of Eight - France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Russia

GOP   Republican Party (Grand Old Party)

ICT   Information and Communication Technology

NSC   National Security Council

PPD   Presidential Policy Directive

UK   The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

UN   United Nations Organisation

US   The United States of America

USA   The United States of America

WMD   Weapon of Mass Destruction

1. Introduction

> "It's been a long time coming, but tonight, because of what we did on this day, in this election, at this defining moment, change has come to America."

> Barack Obama – Excerpt from victory speech presented at Grant Park, 4 November 2008.

The outcome of the 2008 United States (US) presidential election is considered by many to be the result of a deep-seated need for change in US politics. Barack Obama, in fact, centred his highly successful campaign on the need for change in US politics, both foreign and domestic. During his campaign, and in the wake of his election, many have asked whether a junior senator from Illinois has what it takes to fulfil his ambitious campaign promises of transformation. Per illustration, Hillary Clinton brazenly stated during the primary campaign that while she had "a lifetime of experience" that she would bring to the White House, Senator Obama had "a speech that he gave in 2002"[1] (Balz, 2008). Moreover, Joe Biden made the statement that he did not think that Obama was ready to be president, adding that "[t]he presidency is not something that lends itself to on-the-job training" (ABCNews, 2007). Ironically, today Hillary Clinton serves as Secretary of State within the Obama administration, while Biden serves as Obama's Vice-President. The point they touched upon, however, remains relevant. Considering his age[2] and relative lack of experience, what hope does Obama have of achieving his many stated goals? That query serves as a foundation for this thesis.

A full analysis of Obama's abilities and goals falls outside the scope of this thesis. Instead it will focus on the specific issue of Obama's agency with regard to US *foreign policy*. Particularly interesting about the 2008 election is the extent to which foreign policy served as an important campaign platform (Saldin, 2008). Logan (2008: 1), noting the significance thereof, points out that while "[f]ew U.S. presidential elections have been decided on the basis of foreign policy," the 2008 election saw both the Democrats and Republicans "field candidates who [chose] to emphasise their foreign policy views." This was in large part a reaction to growing criticism of the way in which the George W. Bush[3] administration conducted its foreign policy during its

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[1] Clinton's remark is in reference to the speech Obama delivered in October of 2002 in which he denounced the planed invasion of Iraq as a "dumb war" (Obama, 2002).

[2] Obama was 47 years old on the day of his inauguration, making him the fifth youngest president in US history (White House, 2010d).

[3] The shorthand, 'Bush', will be used in reference to George W. Bush, the 43rd president of the United States and Obama's predecessor. 'George H.W. Bush' will be used to refer to his father, the 41st president of the United States.

eight year term, and particularly after the September 11 terrorist attacks (hereafter referred to as 9/11). Bush's doctrine of unilateralism and pre-emptive warfare, as well as his refusal to engage with the enemies of the US on the diplomatic front, were central to Obama's critique of Bush during his campaign (Obama, 2007b; Mastanduno, 2008). It was thus on the back of this wave of anti-Bush and anti-Republican sentiment that Barack Obama campaigned for *Change*. Apart from just being a reversal of many of the Bush administration's policies, Obama emphasised a revival and the reestablishment of US legitimacy and goodwill abroad (Obama, 2007b). The question at the core of this thesis is whether Barack Obama will have the presidential agency in foreign policy required to change global perceptions of the US by reforming the way it conducts its foreign policy.

1.1. Foreign Policy Context of Obama's Election

Obama, as with all presidents before him, came to the White House within an existing foreign policy status quo. In order to understand the significance of the task at hand it is thus helpful to understand the role that the foreign policy context played in Obama's election. During the run up to the election, as well as during the primary campaign, there were two particularly salient issues on the US political landscape. The first was the on-going war in Iraq; the second was the economic meltdown that became global news in September 2008 with the collapse of US based investment bank, Lehman Brothers. Given the focus of this thesis, the latter largely falls outside the scope thereof. Instead it will concentrate on the war in Iraq within the context of broader US foreign policy, the demise of the Bush administration and Obama's subsequent rise to power.

It is worth noting that within traditional voting behaviour discourse in US politics, domestic issues and the economy are ascribed supremacy in influencing voters, while foreign policy concerns are largely rejected as playing an insignificant role (Aldrich, Sullivan and Borgida, 1989; Mastanduno, 2008). The exception to this rule is where elections have coincided with major wars, foreign policy has consistently played a greater role in swaying voters (Mastanduno, 2008). Saldin (2008) notes the Korean, Vietnam and Cold War as the more frequently cited examples of this phenomenon, while tracing the trend as far back as the 1898 and 1900 elections and the role played by the Spanish-American War. It should thus come as no surprise that during his study of the role that foreign policy played in the 2008 election, Saldin (2008) noted that while the economy was cited as a central issue to voters during pre-election polling – especially after the collapse of Lehman Brothers – the war in Iraq was often cited as the *most important* issue.

During the 2008 elections, the on-going war in Iraq became the focal point of resentment and criticism levelled at post-9/11 US foreign policy, both domestically and abroad. The search for Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda under the guise of the War on Terror served as the initial justification for the invasion of Afghanistan, while the search for Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) served as a justification for the invasion of Iraq and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. Both events dramatically changed perceptions of US foreign policy as a result of the various polices Bush adopted in their wake. Despite it having become somewhat pedestrian to refer back to 9/11 as a watershed moment in US politics, insofar as it initiated the War on Terror and forced American society to take cognisance of their position in a changing global order, it cannot be underestimated. The 9/11 attacks placed foreign policy at the fore of US politics and dominated it for the next seven years (Saldin, 2008). The reason for this is that 9/11 provided Bush with an opportunity to introduce his own brand of foreign policy, or what Daalder and Lindsay (2003: 4) term "the Bush revolution."

During the Bush administration, foreign policy became synonymous with national security, understood in this context as the need to secure the US against its enemies. During his two terms in office, Bush was not preoccupied with economic or environmental security, but rather focused on eradicating potential threats to the US through his War on Terror. A telling speech in this regard was the State of the Union Address of 29 January 2002, during which Bush (2002 – emphasis added) memorably referred to Iraq, Iran and North Korea as an "axis of evil," insofar as their quest for WMDs posed an imminent threat to US and global security:

> States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. ... And all nations should know: *America will do what is necessary to ensure our nation's security.*

Moreover, Bush's foreign policy over the course of his two terms in office became increasingly characterised by a disregard for international institutions and multilateralism, and a preference for a more unilateral approach (Dumbrell, 2002). Bush believed that for the US to be safe it had to seek out and destroy its potential enemies abroad – hence the doctrine of pre-emptive warfare – even if this meant doing it alone. While in the initial wake of the 9/11 attacks, the American public were similarly ready to "do what is necessary" to secure their safety, the protracted and costly war in Iraq was yet to take its toll. In the 2004 presidential election, Bush successfully used his commitment to the issue of national security to rally support for himself, with 34% of voters noting it as the most important issue. Zbigniew Brzezinski (2009: 59), former National Security Advisor to President Jimmy Carter, notes that this was effectively achieved by infecting the American public with "a demagogically propagated culture of fear."

By the 2006 midterm election, however, the American public had become increasingly aware that the tide had turned against the US forces in Iraq. The Democrats were able to use this growth in anti-war sentiment over "what at the time appeared to be an inevitable failure in Iraq" to defeat the Republicans and gain control of both chambers of Congress[4] for the first time in twelve years (Saldin, 2008: 6). Exit polls revealed that the war ranked first among 49% of respondents with support for the Democrats relating directly to their opposition to it (Ceaser and DiSalvo, 2006). The war had become a liability not only for President Bush – whose approval ratings plummeted from a high of 90% just after 9/11 to a low of 27% upon leaving office – but also for the Republican party (Jones, 2008).

Importantly, the significance of the war as an issue was only superseded by the failing economy in November of 2008 (CNN, 2008). During the primaries, it was one of the foremost contributing issues to Obama's nomination as Democratic candidate (Saldin, 2008). Obama was the only top-tier candidate who could claim that he had never supported the war, in recognition of the speech he gave against it in 2002 (Obama, 2002). While his opponents in the primaries could claim *experience*, notably Clinton and Biden who both supported the war in Senate votes, Obama's trump card was his good judgement in consistent opposition to it. Obama's unique position on the war served as the platform on which he could run a campaign despite his obvious lack of experience. Interestingly, Clinton herself cited Iraq as the reason Obama was able to defeat her (Novak, 2008).

Two important points can be gleaned from the preceding exposition and these will serve as the foundation for this thesis. Firstly, foreign policy played a decisive role in the 2008 presidential election, and the choice of Obama as commander-in-chief. Secondly, the election of Obama was not based on his pre-existing experience but rather on his foresight and judgement in lieu of it. McCain's defeat was largely a rejection of the status quo in US politics as he had been framed, rightly or wrongly, as four more years of Bush. Obama campaigned from a platform of *change* and was elected with *change* as his mandate.

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[4] Although Congress is usually referred to in the singular form as one coherent entity, it is bicameral in nature. The lower chamber, the House of Representatives, is populated by 435 members from similarly sized districts who serve two-year terms. The upper chamber, the Senate, is populated by 100 members consisting of two Senators from each of the 50 states who serve six-year terms. For the purposes of this thesis the term Congress will be used to refer to the unified body, while the House and Senate will be used to refer to the respective chambers.

1.2. The Dimensions of Change

It is important to point out that Obama's desire for change reflects more than a simple reaction to the American public's dissatisfaction with an increasingly costly war. The decline in US power on the global stage has become a frequent topic for discussions in political discourse[5]. Obama's desire for change thus reflects a profound recognition of the fact that in order to secure the interests of the US it must reform its foreign policy. Brzezinski (2009: 53) concurs with this assessment given the context of global disapproval of the Bush administration's foreign policies, noting that the "new president assumes office ... in the middle of a widespread crisis of confidence in the US' capacity to exercise effective leadership in world affairs." Adding to this is what he refers to as a *global political awakening*: "[f]or the first time in human history almost all of humanity is politically activated, politically conscious and politically interactive" (Brzezinski, 2009: 53). In other words, the advances in information and communication technology (ICT) have enabled a global audience to tune into US politics and follow wars being fought on other continents in real time. This allows them greater scrutiny of how the US conducts itself abroad. The result of this has been that despite the drastic increase in US military might, it has suffered a major blow to its soft power and its image abroad. Brzezinski (2009: 54) illustrates the consequence of this succinctly: "[I]n earlier times, it was easier to control one million people than to physically kill one million people; today, it is infinitely easier to kill one million people than to control one million people."

It is clear from his campaign speeches that Obama shares Brzezinski's view of a decline in US leadership and has frequently emphasised the need to restore it. In an essay in which he detailed his view on foreign policy, Obama (2007b) stated that "This is [America's] moment to renew the trust and faith of our people – and all people – in an America that battles immediate evils, promotes an ultimate good, and leads the world once more." This statement regarding a renewal of trust is the US is in part a reaction to an increase in international criticism of the US over alleged human rights abuses, torture and the contravention of the Geneva Convention during Bush's war on terror (Hoffman, 2004). Two issues that received a particularly great deal of negative international attention can be noted in this regard: The first is the issue of torture and prisoner abuse surrounding the Abu Ghraib detention facility in Iraq; the second is the detention and interrogation of suspected terrorists at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp in Cuba. In this context, Obama's desire to restore moral leadership by the US equates to his belief that the US should behave in way that "reflect[s] the decency and aspirations of the American people"

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[5] See, for example, Nye, 2004 and Wallerstein, 2003.

(Obama, 2007b). In order to move from this ideal, to a workable foreign policy, is no insignificant endeavour. Brzezinski (2009: 54) believes that Obama has to shape a new foreign policy with the ability to accomplish four tasks, namely to *unify*; to *enlarge*; to *engage*; and to *pacify*.

The first task, to *unify*, entails the re-establishment of the transatlantic dialogue between the US and Europe. More specifically this implies rebuilding relationships with the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), based on a shared vision and shared decision making. While the US and United Kingdom (UK) maintained a healthy relationship during the war on terror – with former Prime Minister Tony Blair being one of Bush's greatest and most vocal allies – other EU states, notably France and Germany, were equally vocal in their denunciations of Bush's foreign policy (Brzezinski, 2009). Obama indicated an early commitment to restoring these relationships while conducting a tour of Europe during his presidential campaign. In a landmark speech in Berlin, where he was warmly greeted by an audience of over 200,000 admirers, Obama called for greater unity between the US and its allies, admitting of the US that "there are times when our actions around the world have not lived up to our best intentions" (Balz and Smiley, 2008).

The second task, the need to *enlarge*, refers to "a deliberate effort to nurture a wider coalition of principal partners ... committed to ... interdependence and prepared to play a significant ... role in promoting more effective global management" (Brzezinski, 2009: 56). In essence, it is necessary for the US to cultivate new political and economic allies that better reflect existing global realities, as opposed to clinging to traditional groupings that no longer reflect the global balance of power, such as the Group of 8[6] (G8). This will allow for greater interdependence and frequent consultation between the US and countries "that possess not only economic and financial weight but also regional geopolitical significance" (Brzezinski, 2009: 56). Importantly, Obama (2007) also acknowledge the need to expand the allies of the US, and noted Brazil, India, Nigeria, and South Africa as emerging powers worth building relationships with.

The third task, to *engage*, requires that the US initiates increased top-level, informal dialogues with specific global powers deemed "crucial to global geopolitical stability," including

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[6] The G8 is forum of some of the largest industrialised countries in the world dating back to 1975. It initially consisted of 6 nations including France, the United States, Britain, Germany, Japan and Italy. Canada joined in 1976 while Russia became a fully-fledged member in 1998 (it attended the 1997 summit but did not participate fully on all issues). The EU is also represented in the group but does not share the rotating hosting or chairing duties.

"the European Triad, China, Japan, Russia and possibly India" (Brzezinski, 2009: 56). Brzezinski believes that informal talks between the leadership of the US – currently the predominant global power – and its likely successors (notably China), will help to develop a shared sense of global responsibility. This stems from a belief that many global problems – such as climate change and poverty, *inter alia* – can only be solved through co-operation between the world's largest and most influential powers. This has been one of the guiding principles of Obama's foreign policy since early in his campaign, a view he emphasised in 2007: "America cannot meet the threats of this century alone, and the world cannot meet them without America."

Finally, the fourth task is to *pacify*. Brzezinski (2009: 58) understands this as a US that is not "bogged down militarily and politically in the vast area ranging from east of Suez to west of India," as this would result in a "protracted post-imperial war in the post-colonial age." By implication, the US has to move to resolve the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan, address security concerns over Pakistan, and assist with the resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian peace process. One can expand on this reasoning, however, and include the pacification of a nuclear-armed North Korea as well as "a revanchist Russia itching to reaffirm hegemony over the previous Soviet empire" as similarly important tasks (Jones, 2008: 39). Similarly to Brzezinski, Obama (2007) voiced the need to address these issues, especially acknowledging the need to combat the global spread of nuclear weapons, stating that as president he would "work with other nations to secure, destroy, and stop the spread of these weapons in order to dramatically reduce the nuclear dangers for our nation and the world."

Remarkably, Brzezinski's four tasks concisely summate the various foreign policy goals that Obama set out in the numerous speeches and interviews he conducted during the campaign, as well as since coming to office. Obama has repeatedly stated his desire to renew and restore US leadership in the international environment, and regain the US' position as a moral beacon to the world. It thus comes as no surprise that Brzezinski (quoted in Zacharia, 2007), considered to be one of the most influential foreign policy experts in the Democratic Party, endorsed Obama's presidential bid:

> There is a need for a fundamental rethinking of how we conduct world affairs … [a]nd Obama seems to me to have both the guts and the intelligence to address that issue and to change the nature of America's relationship with the world.

1.3. Research Aims

It is clear from the aforementioned exposition that Obama faces no small task in reforming the way the US engages in foreign affairs. The price of securing the US against another 9/11

style attack has been the loss of the moral high ground it once held, something Obama has unequivocally stated he would like to reclaim (Obama, 2007b). The central question that this thesis will attempt to answer is whether Obama possesses the agency to significantly transform US foreign policy in order to remake the US's image abroad and restore its moral leadership? In order to determine this, this thesis will attempt to measure Obama's *presidential agency* with regard to foreign policy.

This central question of presidential agency introduces two issues for consideration based on two levels of analysis. The first and foremost of these relates to the issue of presidential agency in the context of constraints presidents face as a result of institutional and bureaucratic environment in which they must function. The primary level of analysis will thus focus on the *office of the president* and the constitutionally determined powers it possesses. This necessitates an understanding of how US foreign policy is determined and the role that the president plays in doing so. It must be noted that while Obama's administration represents a change in government, it does not represent a purging of all old-school politicians and bureaucrats from Washington. On the contrary – the large majority of politicians and bureaucrats have not changed since Bush left office. While there may be change in the White House, there is a great deal of continuity in the broader Washington context. The question that must be addressed is the effect that this will have on Obama's ability to bring about the changes he seeks to make.

The second issue is a corollary to the first and examines Barack Obama as an *individual president*, as opposed to the office of the president, and introduces the second level of analysis. This necessitates an examination of the politics of personality and the extent to which Obama differs from his predecessors in terms of his worldview and general orientation towards foreign policy, *inter alia*. There are those who believe that Obama represents a new breed of politician. Hendricks and Denton (2010), for example, explored his creative use of modern ICT during his election campaign, arguing that it gave Obama an edge over his competition as a result of the increasingly interconnected nature of the global society. This thesis argues that this utilisation of ICT has the further potential to provide him with greater agency in both domestic and foreign affairs. In support of this argument one can return to the example of his Berlin speech. The perceptions of the 200,000 Germans who turned up to support Obama were equally shaped by the conventional mass media as they were by social networking technologies (such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter) that were heavily utilised by the Obama campaign. One of the arguments of this thesis is that Obama's utilisation of modern ICT as a political tool has increased his agency in comparison to his predecessors. While this may not be an entirely new effect – it can be argued that part of Bush's global unpopularity can be attributed to the vast amount of global

media coverage of his shortcomings – Obama is the first president to proactively utilise these technologies in order to shape public opinion of the US abroad.

The central hypothesis of this thesis is that while all presidents are exposed to roughly the same set of institutional constraints (with some caveats to be examined in the subsequent chapters), what will distinguish Obama from his predecessors is the way in which he engages with these constraints within the context of the specific foreign policy issues he must address. This introduces a distinction with regard to presidential foreign policy agency between *formal* and *informal powers*. *Formal powers* of the president are conferred on him by the Constitution and remain constant from one administration to the next. In contrast to this, *informal powers* have no legislative origin and differ between presidents depending on their personal traits and worldview. Given a consistent set of formal powers, a particular president's ability to shape foreign policy depends both on the specific challenges they face, as well as on their approach and utilisation of informal powers in addressing these.

This thesis will argue that given the specific challenges Obama must face, his differentiating characteristics and reliance on informal powers will potentially provide him with the agency to bring about change in US foreign policy.

1.4. Methodology and Conceptual Framework

Given that this thesis is attempting to gauge Obama's potential agency as opposed to evaluating his presidential record retroactively, an exploratory approach is commanded. It is not the task of this thesis to provide a retroactive assessment of Obama's presidency, but instead to provide a forward-looking prognosis for US foreign policy during Obama's term in office.

In order to determine Obama's agency, the first section of the thesis will focus on the primary level of analysis and engage with the existing literature on the role of the president in foreign policy determination. The purpose of this section will be to unpack the foreign policy making process and evaluate the theoretical capabilities held by the office of the president. This will provide an understanding of the limitations imposed on the president by the US Constitution and how these affect their potential agency. Other constraints, such as the domestic and international environment in which they must function, will also be explored as potential limitations.

The second section of the thesis will concentrate on the secondary level of analysis – the president as individual – and will attempt to establish a framework for forecasting how Obama

will fare given his constitutional constraints and limitations. In other words, which factors have increased presidential agency in the past, and which of these factors are possessed by Obama? In order to determine this framework a number of different types of sources will be utilised including theoretical sources within the purely academic discourse, as well as mainstream sources within the broader political analysis discourse. This will allow for the abstraction of various informal powers identified by scholars, as well as the common traits found in presidents considered to be successful diplomats. In chapter 3 this framework will be shown to include five criteria that a president must adhere to if they are to be successful in shaping foreign policy: (1) a favourable disposition to foreign affairs; (2) the ability to provide strong leadership in policy formulation; (3) a command over Pennsylvania Avenue politics; (4) the utilisation of the role of public opinion maker; (5) and the utilisation of the role of global statesmen.

Subsequent to establishing this framework, four broad categories of sources will be utilised to measure Obama against it. These will include Obama's *statements and utterances* on foreign policy; his *actions* since coming to office; *perceptions* of the Obama administration and US leadership, and *commentary from the global arena*. An in-depth discussion of the methodology used to measure Obama's agency will be provided in chapter 4.

1.5. Limitations

Before engaging with the task at hand it is prudent to point out a number of limitations to the scope of this thesis. The first limitation is on the *timeline* for analysis, considering that the task at hand is to measure Obama's *presidential* agency. This thesis will thus focus on Obama's time in office since his inauguration on 20 January 2009, as well as his election campaign. It is important to include the latter as Obama's short time in office has limited the availability of sources that focus on his presidency. Moreover, Obama's approach to the campaign, and the many speeches and discussions that transpired during it, are particularly revealing about his underlying worldview. Note, however, that although Obama announced his candidacy in 2007, this thesis will take his 2002 speech against the war in Iraq as its starting point, as this speech was often referred to during his campaign.

Secondly, this thesis will limit itself to studying Obama's agency with regard to *foreign policy*. Obama's agency in domestic policy is considered to be a largely separate issue from the one at hand, regardless of the many overlaps between them. Although it is admittedly difficulty to clearly separate domestic policy from foreign policy – especially in the age of globalisation and the emergence of intermestic issues – the task of this thesis is to reach a prognosis on Obama's ability to renew US leadership on the international stage. While the domestic

environment and policy sphere will be referred to where they support the argument of this thesis, it will not be a focal point outside of this.

The third limitation relates to the use of *personality* as a determinant in foreign policy agency. One of the contentions of this thesis is that certain aspects of a president's personality impact on their foreign policy agency. To illustrate, Jentleson (2004) links Woodrow Wilson's clash with his Senate opponents over the Treaty of Versailles to his "self-righteousness," while Nixon's suspicious nature has often been cited in the context of his treatment of the Vietnam War and his eventual downfall as a result of the Watergate saga. Unfortunately 'personality' is a rather vague term that covers a broad spectrum of attributes, not all of which are relevant to foreign policy. Similarly, one must shy away from generalising about specific traits and their causal relationship to foreign policy as the same trait in different presidents may lead to different outcomes. That contention notwithstanding, one can identify certain aspects of presidential personality that are always relevant. These include aspects such as a president's preference for interventionism versus noninterventionism; their preference for multilateralism versus unilateralism; and their preference for diplomacy versus military solutions to political problems. For this reason this thesis will not be doing an in-depth personality profile of Obama, or a detailed analysis of his leadership style, as each of these could form the basis for a research project on their own. Instead, this thesis will focus on Obama's broader *worldview* as this relates directly to the task at hand.

Finally, this thesis will not be looking in-depth into how the *international environment* impacts on US foreign policy, other than to recognise that it can be a constraining factor. That is not to say that the international dimension will be entirely disregarded, but rather that this thesis will be limited to facets thereof that directly relate to Obama's individual level of agency, such as international perceptions of US leadership. The extensive number of states, international institutions and treaties with which the US is involved simply fall beyond the scope of thesis, and could rather be reserved for future study.

1.6. Chapter Outline

In order to answer the questions laid out above, this thesis will be structured into two broad sections corresponding to the two respective levels of analysis.

The primary level of analysis – regarding the office of the president – will be considered in chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 will predominantly outline the formal framework in which presidents must develop and execute their foreign policy goals. In this regard it will feature an in-depth analysis of the workings of the US foreign policy machinery, and the involvement of the

president therein. The main question that this chapter will seek to answer is how foreign policy is determined, as well as evaluate the power the president possesses in shaping it. This will necessitate an overview of the structure of the US government, as well as the US Constitution, with regard to how various foreign policy powers are divided among the three branches of government. It will also include an overview of other general constraints that are deemed to limit presidential agency.

After establishing the formal constraints on foreign policy in chapter 2, chapter 3 will look at the informal powers held by the president and how these impact on their personal level of agency. The main focus of chapter 3 will be a study of characteristics that have aided past presidents in shaping foreign policy given the constraints set out in the preceding chapter. The purpose of this chapter will be to show that although the institutional configuration remains largely unchanged from one administration to the next, the specific set of circumstances faced by a particular president, as well as their personal qualities, have an effect on the way they engage with the constraints they face. This will enable the formulation of a conceptual framework for measuring the various attributes that increase the agency of one president in comparison to another. Chapter 3 will also serve as a bridge between the two levels of analysis as the attributes identified therein will be used to evaluate Barack Obama as the 44th president of the United States.

Chapter 4 will focus entirely on Obama's foreign policy in order to gain a greater understanding of the specific goals he would like to achieve within the broader aim of renewing US leadership. The purpose of chapter 4 will thus be to explore the various principles that guide Obama's foreign policy, his accomplishments to date and his plans for the future.

Chapter 5 will set out to measure Obama against the framework developed in chapter 3 with due regard to Obama's foreign policy goals explored in chapter 4. The main question that chapter 5 will seek to answer is what, if anything, makes Obama different? More importantly, do these differences have the ability to empower him to accomplish his ambitious foreign policy agenda? After measuring Obama against the framework, chapter 5 will also make an assessment of Obama's agency and provide a prognosis for the achievement of his ambitious agenda. Simply stated, will Obama be able to bring about the change he has promised and consequently reform the US' image abroad?

Finally, chapter 6 will serve to conclude this thesis by providing a summary of its findings; its contribution to the academic discourse; and identifying a number of areas for future research.

2. Foreign Policy Powers and Constraints

In order to judge the potential that President Obama has to reform US foreign policy this thesis will be utilising a two-level analysis. As previously explained, the primary level of analysis is related to the office of the president as opposed to the president as a particular individual. The reasoning behind this is that before we can gauge the presidential agency of President Obama, it is first necessary to understand the generic foreign policy powers available to a US president, as well as the constraints on these powers. The purpose of this chapter is thus to explore the foreign policy powers of the president and how these are tempered both by other institutions, as well as by the structural framework in which the president must function.

The starting point for this study is the US Constitution as it is predominately responsible for delineating powers between the various branches of government. The Constitution was written in the wake of the US War of Independence and the perceived threat of an absolute monarch akin to the British sovereign. As such the US Constitution enshrines the separation of powers between the three branches of government and includes a number of checks and balances to prevent any single branch from acquiring excessive power (Fisher, 1989; Schlesinger, 1972). This requires the "acquiescence" of each respective branch of government and a respect for the fact that the Constitution has allocated particular responsibilities to the other branches over which they have no jurisdiction (Mourtada-Sabbah, 2003: 303). The purpose of the next section is to explore the roles conferred on the various branches of government by the Constitution, and how the interaction of these impacts on foreign policy.

2.1. Formal Powers of the President

Since the end of World War II (WWII), and particularly during the Cold War years, there has been an increasing tendency toward presidential dominance in foreign policy[7]. The president has enormous power to determine the foreign policy direction taken by the US government, arguably more so than any other single institution in US politics. The formal powers of the president are those conferred on him and the executive branch by law through provisions made in the Constitution. These provisions, contained in Article II, sections 1 to 3, grant the president a number of foreign policy powers (USA, 2007: 6-8):

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[7] It must be noted that this growth in presidential leadership in foreign policy has not occurred at a steady pace. Instead the relationship is more akin to that of a pendulum that swings between presidential and congressional dominance. Schlesinger (1972: 89) notes that "nearly every President who has extended the reach of the White House has provoked a reaction toward a more restricted theory of the presidency, even if the reaction never quite cuts presidential power back to its earlier level."

Section 1: "The executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States ..."

Section 2: "The President shall be Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, and of the Militia of the several States, when called into the actual Service of the United States; ..."

"He shall have Power, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, to make Treaties, provided two thirds of the Senators present concur; and he shall nominate, and by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, shall appoint Ambassadors, other public Ministers and Consuls, Judges of the supreme Court, and all other Officers of the United States, whose Appointments are not herein otherwise provided for ..."

Section 3: "... he shall receive Ambassadors and other public Ministers; he shall take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed, and shall Commission all the Officers of the United States."

Based on the preceding clauses a number of presidential foreign policy roles can be identified. The taxonomy utilised by Donald Snow is particularly useful for delineating these, and is the taxonomy utilised for the purposes of this thesis. Snow (2005) argues that the Constitution confers six formal roles on the President with regard to foreign policy formulation. These include the roles of (1) Chief Executive; (2) Chief of State; (3) Commander in Chief; (4) Treaty Negotiator; (5) Nominator of Key Personnel; and (6) Recogniser of Foreign Governments. The significance of each of these will be discussed in turn. It is important to take note that many of the formal powers correspond with one of the informal powers insofar as the utilisation of a formal power depends on the president's personality and political savvy, the basis of all informal powers. These will be discussed in chapter 3.

2.1.1. Chief Executive

Article II, Section 1 places the president in the role of chief executive of the US government, making him responsible for the faithful execution of all laws. The implication of this role is that while the president might not physically manage the executive branch of government, all the agencies that comprise this branch ultimately report to him. Snow (2005) argues that the greatest advantage of this is that it provides the president with unrivalled access to resources and information through agencies such as the State Department, the Defence Department, the various intelligence agencies, the Department of Homeland Security and the Office of the US Trade Representative, *inter alia*.

The downside of this is that many of the agencies within the executive branch are in competition with one another for funding, recognition and influence. Moreover they are staffed by individuals who precede and outlast most administrations. The result is that the president – despite his moniker as chief executive – does not sit at the apex of a traditional organisational pyramid, but must instead contend with departmental and organisational heads and bureaucracies when formulating and implementing a foreign policy agenda (Snow, 2005). While this generally

constrains a president's foreign policy options, the ability to overcome this barrier is a significant informal power of the president. The way in which the president interacts with his advisors and the bureaucratic structures in Washington will be studied in section 3.1.2, while Obama's ability to do so will be evaluated in section 5.1.2.

Another power that Jentleson (2004) includes under the role of chief executive is the confirmation of legislation passed by Congress. While this may arguably be defined as a legislative power of the president the difference is semantic; the point remains that before laws can be executed they must be approved by the president. The implication of this role is that the president is conferred with a veto power over legislation, referred to by Jentleson (2004: 38) as "the most potent executive power the Constitution gives the president." A president thus has the right to block any legislation passed by Congress. In this event the legislation is returned to Congress where it can then only be passed if the presidential veto is overridden by a two-thirds majority in both chambers. Considering the often strained nature of the relationship between the president and Congress (discussed in detail in section 2.4) this represents a formidable power of the president.

2.1.2. Chief of State

The role of chief of state refers to the president as the "symbolic personification of the American state," placing him in the same category as the US flag and national anthem (Snow, 2005: 91). While the role is often denigrated to ceremonial status, the importance thereof to presidents who are able to utilise its symbolic power cannot be overstated.

Snow (2005) explains that while in juxtaposition to Congress the president possesses the same legal authority, he is afforded unrivalled deference and status as the leader of the American people. This status is enforced by the internationally recognisable symbols attached to the presidency, including the White House, Air Force One (the presidential plane) and Marine One (the presidential helicopter). These help to extend the stature of the US presidency beyond its borders, with the president of the US often being considered to be the most powerful political leader in the world.

Presidents who have been able to utilise this power – notably Ronald Reagan, a former actor – found themselves in a greatly advantageous position when negotiating foreign policy issues both domestically and abroad. In contrast to this, presidents who failed to appreciate the power of the presidency – such as Jimmy Carter, a former peanut farmer – were often unable to carry the aura required for strong leadership.

2.1.3. Commander in Chief

The third role conferred on the president by the Constitution, under Article II, Section 2, is that of commander in chief of the US armed forces. Far more than just a ceremonial title, the clause gives the White House the authority to determine "when, where and for what purpose US armed forces are committed abroad" (Snow, 2005: 92). This represents the power to *make war*, if not to declare it as such.

This power of the president has been one of the more contentious over the past decades as the role of commander in chief is directly limited by the Constitution through powers conferred on Congress. In theory the Constitution reserves the right to formally declare war for Congress. In practice, however, presidents have the power to engage in conflict without such a declaration. In fact, approximately two hundred presidentially ordered conflicts in US history were not accompanied by a formal declaration of war (Elsea and Grimmet, 2007). The matter is further complicated by provisions made in the War Powers Resolution that further limits when and how the president may commit US armed forces. These issues are discussed in greater depth in the section on congressional war powers (see section 2.2.4).

2.1.4. Treaty Negotiator

The power vested in the president to negotiate treaties on behalf of the US is not an insignificant one. That notwithstanding, the Constitution clearly states that while the president has right to negotiate treaties, they must be ratified by a two-thirds vote of the Senate before becoming legally binding, considerably constraining this right (see section 2.2.6). It is for this reason that presidents have increasingly come to rely on *executive agreements* to establishing international agreements.

Executive agreements are similar to treaties insofar as they represent a commitment on behalf of the US, but differ insofar as they do not require Senate approval nor are they legitimised in the Constitution (Skodvin and Andresen, 2009). Snow (2005: 93) notes that "today, executive agreements outnumber treaties by a ratio of nearly twenty to one" in what "constitutes a sharp departure from the constitutional design that presidents should not be able to unilaterally determine US foreign policy." The problem is that the number of agreements between the US and other governments are so numerous that it would be impractical for Senate to consider all of them for ratification prior to initiation. Executive agreements thus originated from the need for a method of handling more routine international dealings (Jentleson, 2004). This initial intent has however been lost of late as executive agreements have increasingly become a means for presidents to circumvent Senate and make significant foreign policy

commitments free from the constraints imposed by the need for congressional approval (Skodvin and Andresen, 2009).

2.1.5. Nominator of Key Personnel

Article II, Section 2 of the Constitution grants the president the authority to nominate and appoint, "by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate," certain senior officials as well as all ambassadors (USA, 2007: 7). This provides the president with a great deal of influence over how foreign policy is executed by giving him the power to select those responsible for doing so. The only constraint on this power is that nominees must be confirmed by the Senate. In most cases Senate confirms the president's choices and provides him with considerable freedom to staff his administration. In some cases, however, the Senate has been known to reject nominees for their lack of particular expertise or where doing so sends a political message to the White House. A good example of this is the rejection of Reagan's nominee for assistant secretary of state for human rights, Ernest W. Lefever, in order to send a message to President Reagan that he was not taking the human rights agenda seriously enough (Snow, 2005). For a more detailed overview of the confirmation power of the Senate, see section 2.2.5.

2.1.6. Recogniser of Foreign Governments

Finally, Article II, Section 3 of the Constitution states that the president "shall receive Ambassadors and other public Ministers," granting the president the implied power to recognise foreign governments (USA, 2007: 8). In other words, a president can award, continue or terminate recognition of a foreign government through his decision to receive foreign officials or maintain a diplomatic presence in foreign capitals.

Snow (2005) recalls the example of China-US relations in this regard, noting that between 1949 and 1972 the US government refused to recognise the communist regime in Beijing. After the formation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, under the leadership of Chairman Mao, the US was adamant about recognising defeated Chinese nationalists residing in Taiwan as the true representatives of China. It was not until President Nixon visited China in 1972 that the US officially recognised the communist government in Beijing as the legitimate ruling party. For this reason, Wittkopf, Kegley and Scott (2003) also refer to this role as that of *chief diplomat*.

The positive utilisation of this role as chief diplomat, as well as that of chief of state and treaty negotiator, is considered to be one of the informal powers that a president possesses under the utilisation of the role of global statesman. The general utilisation of this role as an informal power will be discussed in section 3.1.5, with Obama's ability to utilise it being studied in section 5.1.5.

2.2. Formal Powers of Congress

It is somewhat ironic that the president has come to enjoy so much influence in the foreign policy sphere as a narrow reading of the Constitution shows that Congress is imbued with the lion's share of the formal foreign policy powers it bestows. As Trimble (1989: 751) argues, "[a]n effective foreign policy requires more than ideas and pronouncements. It requires institutions, agencies, people and money, and Congress controls them all." Moreover, LaFeber (1987) points out that during the writing of the Constitution, the Founding Fathers[8] were very particular about limiting executive powers and the provisions aimed at doing so were clearly included by design. This must be seen in the context of the US War of Independence and the suspicions held by the Founding Fathers over an executive with unlimited powers similar to those held by the British monarch at the time. This makes it imperative that the congressional powers and responsibilities, and how they aim to limit presidential agency, are clearly understood.

The Constitution of the US (2007: 1-6) grants Congress a number of foreign policy powers through provisions contained in Article I:

Section 1. "All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives."

Section 7. 1 "All Bills for raising Revenue shall originate in the House of Representatives; but the Senate may propose or concur with Amendments as on other Bills. ..."

Section 8. "The Congress shall have Power To lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts, and Excises, to pay the Debts and provide for the common Defence and general Welfare of the United States;

To regulate Commerce with foreign Nations ...

To coin Money, regulate the Value thereof, and of foreign Coin ...

To define and punish Piracies and Felonies committed on the high Seas, and Offences against the Law of Nations;

To declare War, grant Letters of Marque and Reprisal, and make Rules concerning Captures on Land and Water;

To raise and support Armies ...

To provide and maintain a Navy;

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[8] The Founding Fathers of the United States generally refers to either political leaders who adopted the Declaration of Independence at the Continental Congress of 1776, or the 55 delegates who wrote and signed the Constitution of the United States during the Constitutional Convention of 1787. American historian, Richard Morris (Morris, 1973), notes 7 key figures in this regard, including Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, John Jay, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton.

To make Rules for the Government and Regulation of the land and naval Forces;

To provide for calling forth the Militia to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress insurrections and repel invasions;

To make all Laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into Execution the foregoing Powers, and a other Powers vested by this Constitution in the Government of the United States, or in any Department or Officer thereof."

Section 9. "No Money shall be drawn from the Treasury, but in Consequence of Appropriations made by Law; ..."

Once again utilising Snow's taxonomy, we can identify six congressional powers based on the preceding constitutional clauses that are conferred on the legislative branch with regard to foreign policy: (1) Law-making Power; (2) Power of the Purse; (3) Oversight Power; (4) War Power; (5) Confirmation Power and (6) Treaty Power. Each of these will be elaborated upon in turn.

2.2.1. Law-making Power

In the first section of the first article the US Constitution unequivocally vests all legislative powers in a "Congress of the United States" consisting out of a House of Representatives and Senate (USA, 2007: 1). This grants the Congress the sole right to determine what is legal and illegal in the US, in the process providing them with great power to shape foreign policy.

This power can be used both directly and indirectly. The former refers to the ability of Congress to adopt legislation that directly affects foreign policy (such as whether to support or reject trade agreements), while the latter refers to the ability of Congress to shape the institutional structure of the executive branch (such as the establishment of cabinet level posts with purview over foreign policy matters).

There is, however, a constraint to these powers insofar as the president retains a veto right over legislation passed by Congress. As explained earlier, the president must sign all legislation before it can be enacted into law. Having said that, the presidential veto of a bill can be overturned by a two-thirds vote in both chambers. Two noteworthy examples of foreign policy legislation vetoed by the president but subsequently overridden and passed by Congress are the 1972 War Powers Resolution (vetoed by Nixon), and the 1986 Anti-Apartheid Act (vetoed by Reagan).

It is important to note that similar to the positive utilisation of presidential powers, the ability of a president to mitigate the constraints posed by congressional powers is an important informal power. This can refer to the ability to work with Congress in order to get legislation

passed, budgets approved and treaties ratified. The president's command over Pennsylvania Avenue politics[9] will be studied in section 3.1.3, with Obama's utilisation thereof being evaluated in section 5.1.3.

2.2.2. Power of the Purse

The power of the purse is really a combined power that stems from stipulations in sections 7, 8 and 9 of the Constitution. These sections grant the right to Congress to raise revenue, determine and collect taxes, as well as legislative right over spending and appropriations. In essence, Congress has final say over the US budget which can have far reaching foreign policy implications – especially in the case of military spending and foreign aid. While the President can request funding for foreign policy initiatives or increased military spending in times of war, it is the prerogative of Congress to grant or deny this request. Where said spending is attached to a particular foreign policy goal or ideal this gives Congress the power to prevent the executive branch from pursuing these ambitions (Jentleson, 2004).

This is particularly relevant in the case of war, where the Founding Fathers, in framing the Constitution, set out with the explicit goal to separate the ability to engage in hostilities (an executive branch privilege) from the ability to fund these (an legislative responsibility). Col. George Mason (quoted in Fisher, 1989: 762), a Constitutional Convention[10] delegate, was notably pointed on this issue: "The purse & the sword ought never to get into the same hands whether Legislative or Executive." Even though it was President Bush and his closest advisers who called for the post-9/11 war in Iraq, it was strictly a congressional prerogative whether or not to fund the hostilities and to continue to do so under the Obama administration. This makes it very important that presidents are able to gain congressional funding for their various policies and initiatives, an important aspect of the President's command over Pennsylvania Avenue politics.

2.2.3. Oversight Power

The power of congressional oversight stems from Congress' role as lawmaker and is not specifically enumerated in the Constitution. In order to properly execute their authority as lawmaker it is necessary for Congress to investigate the implementation and effects of legislation. These investigations encompass far reaching studies and hearings into almost all aspects of the execution of legislation and the actions of the executive branch.

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[9] Presidential-Congressional relations are often referred to as Pennsylvania Avenue diplomacy in reference to the fact that that White House and the Capitol are at opposite ends of the Avenue.
[10] See footnote 7.

Snow (2005) distinguishes between *routine* congressional oversight and *special investigations* into specific policy issues. The former consists of the general monitoring of a number of organisations such as the CIA and Department of Homeland Security. Routine hearings have been responsible for uncovering a number of irregularities and abuses of power by the executive branch and have resulted in laws to strengthen accountability. In some cases this has had the effect of limiting presidential power by placing constraints on which actions can be taken without congressional authorisation, as well as the forcing the disclosure of covert operations to the House and Senate intelligence committees.

In contrast to routine oversight, Congress can also initiate special investigations into specific issues and conduct highly publicised Senate hearings to draw attention to these issues. Examples include the post 9/11 investigation into the intelligence community and their inability to prevent the attacks, as well as justification behind the invasion of Iraq by the Bush administration. It must be noted, however, that while such investigations are generally premised on the notion of accountability and the interests of the American people, they are often motivated by partisan considerations in which case they can serve as a powerful political weapon. This reinforces the need for presidents to maintain amiable relationships with his colleagues on Capitol Hill.

2.2.4. War Power

When the Founding Fathers wrote the Constitution they were very particular about the fact that the president should not be able to commit the United States to war without a formal declaration of war from Congress. As discussed previously, however, the executive branch has increasingly acted independently in this regard under the auspices of the president's designation of Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces.

Examining this power from an historical perspective one finds that Congress has only declared war in the formal sense on eleven occasions relating to five different wars, the most recent being declarations issued during World War II (Elsea and Grimmet, 2007). Despite this, since World War II the US has engaged in a number of conflicts termed wars in popular discourse (notably the Korean War, Vietnam War and Gulf War). Some of these conflicts have been legitimised through statutory authorizations for the use of military force (notably the so-called 'War on Terror', and most recently the invasion of Iraq in 2002), while others were conducted simply on presidential authority.

Subsequent to the perceived corrosion of this congressional power in the wake of the Vietnam War and Cold War, Congress set out to recapture their authority through the passing of

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the War Powers Resolution in 1973 despite a presidential veto of the bill by President Nixon (Elsea and Grimmet, 2007). The War Powers Resolution essentially requires that the president consult with and report to Congress in all instances where the US armed forces are introduced "into hostilities or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances" in keeping with the "intent of the framers of the Constitution of the United States" (USA, 2008). Furthermore, in such cases the president is mandated to terminate the involvement of the US unless subsequently authorised to proceed by Congress.

2.2.5. Confirmation Power

The power of confirmation is stipulated under the power of the president in Article II, Section 2 where it is stated that certain presidential appointments can only be made subject to "the Advice and Consent of the Senate" (USA, 2007: 7). Note that while the preceding powers are shared by both chambers of Congress, the power of confirmation is granted solely to the Senate.

The power of confirmation has both a direct and indirect effect on policy making. The direct effect is an intuitive one as the Senate can simply reject candidates of whom they do not approve (such as the rejection of George H.W. Bush's nomination of John Tower as Secretary of Defence). Considering that some of the positions included under Senate purview include the Secretaries of State and Defence, as well as all ambassadors, this can have far reaching effects on foreign policy formulation and execution. The indirect effect exists through the confirmation hearings held be Senate prior to voting on the eligibility of a candidate (Jentleson, 2004). These hearings, held in public, can be used to air certain grievances over executive branch policy controversies or to bring certain policies to the attention of the media and public (Snow, 2005). Furthermore, the Senate can delay confirmation indefinitely, preventing the president from making an appointment but without rejecting his candidate outright. This can provide the Senate with bargaining power over the president, using their control over the nomination process against him.

2.2.6. Treaty Power

Similar to the power of confirmation, and enacted by the same constitutional clause, Senate is also invested with the power to ratify or reject treaties negotiated by the executive branch. In order to come into law treaties have to be accepted by a two-thirds majority by the Senate; without ratification by Senate, treaties are not legally binding on the US.

This power can present a great stumbling block to the president as it is notoriously difficult to get two-thirds of the Senate to agree on anything. This was illustrated to great effect with the

failure of President Wilson to secure Senate approval of the Treaty of Versailles that brought an end to World War I, blocking the US' ascension to the newly created League of Nations, the precursor to the modern United Nations (UN) (Skodvin and Andresen, 2009). This failure is arguably one of the reasons why presidents have moved increasingly to using executive agreements for codifying international agreements as these are not subject to congressional approval.

2.3. The Judiciary and Foreign Policy

The Constitution does not confer formal foreign policy powers on the judicial branch *per se*, but the Supreme Court[11] has been called on at times to adjudicate disputes between the executive and legislative branches. Jentleson (2004) notes, however, that this is a role that the court is generally either unable or unwilling to perform. Preferring to refrain from getting involved in turf wars between the president and Congress on matters of foreign affairs, the Supreme Court has generally classified these disputes as falling under *political question doctrine*[12] as opposed to being actual issues of constitutional law (Mourtada-Sabbah, 2003). Based on this premise it has often refused to rule definitively in favour of either branch and has called on them to resolve the dispute themselves. In a number of cases[13] the Supreme Court has gone even further and explicitly argued that adjudicating matters of foreign policy jurisdiction between the executive and legislative branches falls outside the purview of the Court:

> The conduct of our foreign relations is committed by the Constitution to the executive and legislative – the political – departments of the government, and the propriety of what may be done in the exercise of this political power is not subject to judicial inquiry or decision (US Supreme Court, 1918).

There are cases where the Supreme Court has intervened, however, both in favour of the president and against him. In the 1936 case of the *United States v. Curtiss-Wright Export Corporation*[14], the Supreme Court ruled that the president was the "sole organ" responsible for foreign relations, citing a statement made by John Marshall (a member of the House of

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[11] The Supreme Court sits at the apex of the US legal system and consists of the Chief Justice of the United States and eight Associate Justices. Justices are nominated by the President subject to confirmation by a majority vote of the Senate

[12] The political question doctrine refers to the deference often showed by courts to political departments, and especially the executive branch, regarding cases that are perceived to be matters of a political as opposed to purely legal nature. When matters are said to fall within the political question doctrine courts generally refrain from ruling definitively (if at all) and instead refer the matter back to political departments for a political solution.

[13] See for example *United States v. Palmer*, 16 U.S. 3 Wheat. 610 610 (1818); *Oetjen v. Central Leather Co.*, 246 U.S. 297 (1918); and *Jones v. United States*, 137 U.S. 202 (1890).

[14] *United States v. Curtiss-Wright Export Corp.*, 299 U.S. 304 (1936)

Representatives) in 1800: "The President is the sole organ of the nation in its external relations, and its sole representative with foreign nations" (Fisher, 2007).

Interestingly, the same justice who wrote the majority opinion for the 1936 case – Justice George S. Sutherland – was also responsible for writing the majority opinion in the 1937 case of the *United States v. Belmont*[15]. The latter case is noteworthy in foreign relations as it conferred on presidential executive agreements a status equivalent to that of treaties (LaFeber, 1987).

A deeper analysis of the role of the judiciary in foreign policy issues falls outside the scope of this thesis. It should suffice to say that while the judicial branch tends to exclude itself from interfering in matters of government and foreign affairs, it has been instrumental in shaping the landscape in which these matters play out. The purpose of this thesis, however, is to examine the role of the president and it is to that task which will be returned.

2.4. Presidential-Congressional Relations

It should be clear from the disposition of constitutionally determined foreign policy roles that the President and Congress *share* the responsibility of determining US foreign policy. Corwin (1957: 171 – emphasis in original) had the following to say on the issue:

> What the Constitution does, *and all that it does, is* to confer on the President certain powers capable of affecting our foreign relations, and certain other powers of the same general kind on the Senate, and still other such powers on Congress; but which of these organs shall have the decisive and final voice in determining the course of the American nation is left for events to resolve.

Instead of being a clearly defined and steadfast power sharing agreement, the power balance is more cyclical in nature. Some presidents are strong foreign policy presidents and push for greater agency of the executive branch in determining the US' agenda abroad. Other presidents are more focussed on domestic issues giving Congress an opening for foreign policy activism. As Corwin argues above, whether a presidential term is one of executive branch agency, or congressional activism, is left for events to resolve. Unfortunately the unpredictable nature of these events makes them particularly difficult to account for and, as such, they will not be given significant attention in this thesis. At present, however, it is prudent to look at how the issue of *partisan alignment* affects the relationship between the president and Congress, and how this can effect foreign policy determination.

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[15] *United States v. Belmont*, 301 U.S. 324 (1937)

In order to understand this problem it is necessary to understand that US politics is dominated by three independently elected institutions consisting of the president and the two chambers of Congress. Furthermore, elected officials come predominantly from two political parties, namely the Democrats or Republicans (also referred to as the GOP, for Grand Old Party). In this context, partisan alignment refers to the fact that when caucusing or voting, members of the House and Senate generally do so along party lines, even when controlling for personal ideological preferences (Hager and Talbert, 2000; Cox and Poole, 2002). Bearing in mind that the president is elected from a partisan platform, the aforementioned can result in confrontation with the chambers of Congress when they are held by opposing parties. This problem has also gotten worse as congressional partisanship on foreign policy matters has been on an increasing trend in the post-Cold War era (Cameron, 2005).

Consider the following. At any given time either the Democrats or the GOP can hold the White House (in the form of the president) and majority control in *either*, *both* or *neither* chambers of Congress. With reference to the president this can result in three potential configurations in order of preference (Ceaser and DiSalvo, 2006): (1) *unified government*, where the president's party controls both chambers of Congress; (2) *partly divided government*, where the president's party controls either the House or the Senate, but not both; (3) *(fully) divided government*, where the president's party controls neither chamber.

The issue is further complicated by the fact that congressional elections are held every second year, (called midterm elections in years when no presidential election takes place). The result of this is that the alignment configuration can change during a president's term in office. During midterm elections all 435 member of the House are up for re-election as they serve two-year terms, while a third of the senators are up for re-election as their six-year terms are staggered to provide greater consistency in the upper chamber. During midterm elections a president's party can *win*, *lose* or *maintain* control of a chamber. Depending on the configuration prior to the midterm election this can result in (1) *no change* whatsoever; (2) an *improvement* (where his party wins control of one or both chambers); (3) a *deterioration* (where his party loses control of one or both chambers); (4) or a situation where there is *no net change* as control of the Senate is substituted for control of the House, or vice versa.

The reason why this is important is rather intuitive; a President will find it easier to pass legislation or receive confirmations in a Congress that is controlled by his own party. A divided government has the major constraint of having to fight a partisan battle in one or both chambers of Congress. This can either derail the executive branch agenda or lead to a compromise solution

that does not meet initial (more ambitious) goals. Simply stated, partisan politics can lead to significant clashes between the legislative and executive branches and may "have grave implications for the capacity of the executive to conduct foreign policy" (Peterson, 1994: 222). The ability to work across partisan divisions is thus an important facet of the informal power held by presidents who are able to manage Pennsylvania Avenue politics.

A further reason why the party alignment of Congress is so important is because in US politics the speaker of the House of Representatives – the presiding officer in the House and second in the line of presidential succession (after the vice president) – is elected by the House from the majority party. Thus whoever controls the House earns the power to elect the speaker. Moreover, this gives the majority party substantial power over the legislative process by giving them control of the legislative agenda (Finocchiaro and Rohde, 2008; Gailmard and Jenkins, 2007). Cox and McCubbins (2005) have been staunch proponents of this theory, going so far as to argue that the majority party usurps the power of the legislature conferred on it by the Constitution by strictly controlling which issues are tabled for debate, and which are not (known as *negative agenda control*). As Speaker of the House Nicholas Longworth (R-OH) (quoted in Galloway, 1968: 144) stated in 1925:

> I believe it to be the duty of the Speaker … standing squarely on the platform of his party, to assist in so far
> as he properly can the enactment of legislation in accordance with the declared principles and policies of his
> party and by the same token to resist the enactment of legislation in violation thereof.

Similarly, the president *pro tempore* of the Senate – the second highest ranking Senate official after the US vice president who serves *ex officio* as president of the Senate – is elected by the Senate and is customarily the majority party's most senior senator. The president *pro tempore* is third in the line of presidential succession, after the Speaker of the House of Representatives. While the formal powers of the majority party in the Senate does not extend as far as it does in the House (Ceaser and DiSalvo, 2006), a number of scholars have found evidence that they still have noteworthy agenda control power through a number of institutional mechanisms (Cox and McCubbins, 2005; Crespin and Monroe, 2005; Den Hartog and Monroe, 2006). Gailmard and Jenkins (2007: 699) even argue that "in terms of keeping unwanted measures from receiving floor consideration, the Senate majority party is no less successful than the House majority party when it faces disagreement from some non-majority party actor." The point is that despite consensus that presidents generally enjoy more power over foreign policy determination than Congress, these powers are not absolute (Peterson, 1994). In the words of Oldfield and Wildavsky (1989: 227)

As ideological and partisan divisions have come to reinforce each other ... [f]oreign policy has become more like domestic policy – a realm marked by serious partisan divisions in which the president cannot count on a free ride.

President Obama, however, has long stated his desire to work across partisan lines in order to solve the problems facing the US[16]. It was mentioned earlier that the ability to do so is an important informal power of the president. Obama's ability to do so is evaluated extensively in section 5.1.3.

2.5. Constraints on the President's Foreign Policy Agency

Presidential power in shaping foreign policy is determined by other factors, however, and is a balancing act between powers and constraints. While some of these constraints exist by design (such as the need for Senate ratification of treaties stipulated in the Constitution), others are more intangible and insidious. The role of Congress in shaping foreign policy and tempering the power of the president has already received a great deal of attention, leaving the other constraints to be addressed forthwith. Donald Snow (2005) identifies five general constraints and it is with these that this section will begin.

The first of these constraints that bears mention is *past policies and programmes*. This constraint is one of the more intuitive to understand as it should come as no surprise that when a new president comes to power he inherits the foreign policy context and outcomes of his predecessor. The foreign policy slate is not wiped clean with the election of a new president but rather retains the remnants of previous administrations. Examples of this are numerous, but per illustration the Obama administration inherited the War on Terror and the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan, *inter alia*. The significance of this constraint is that it decreases the number of policy options available to a new administration as old policies cannot always be easily modified or even reversed. At the very least they can extend the time frame required for the implementation of changes.

The second constraint is *bureaucratic responsiveness*. This constraint refers to the fact that the staffers of administrative and bureaucratic departments precede and outlast the administrations they serve. In many cases these staffers may not share the views or vision of a new president and way work to undermine the implementation of these. While presidents can attempt to counter this phenomenon through the deployment of political allies to strategic positions within departments, but often with only limited success.

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[16] See, for example, Obama's (2007c) official announcement of his candidacy.

A third constraint exists in the problem of *time management*. Without overstating the obvious, presidents have a limited time in office and often a great deal more problems to deal with than what they have time for (Cameron, 2005). Moreover, external circumstances can influence the amount of time they are able to spend on specific issues by forcing them to prioritise other issues. A good example of this is where a president is forced to respond to a pressing domestic issue – such as the recent economic crisis – resulting in him having less time to deal with less urgent foreign issues.

The fourth constraint faced by new presidents is the *electoral process and re-election*. First-term presidents are very aware of the fact that if they plan on seeking re-election they have to have a record that is at worst voter neutral. In other words, in order to win re-election presidents have to be careful not to promote or adopt any policies that will alienate large portions of the electorate. The often implies a more conservative approach to foreign policy, at least during their first term in office. Second-term presidents do not face this constraint as they are not eligible for re-election. For this reason one can expect second-term presidents to pursue a more ambitious foreign policy agenda.

The fifth and final constraint is termed the *constriction of policy possibility*, a problem particularly relevant to the Obama administration. This is arguably less of a constraint, than a condition imposed on them, as it essentially represents the divide between what new presidents would like to achieve and what is practically feasible. This is particularly applicable in cases where a new president has vastly different goals from previous presidents, or where they are from opposing parties (Snow, 2005). The reason for this is that in such a case presidential candidates often campaigned from a platform of dramatic change with regard to the incumbent, but when in office are unable to deliver on their many promises. It remains to be seen whether President Obama will be able to deliver on his many promises.

Apart from the general constraints identified by Snow, there are a number of other constraints that require more in-depth analysis. These include the domestic and foreign policy trade-off; the power of domestic pressure and public opinion; and the international context in which presidents come to power.

2.5.1. The Domestic and Foreign Policy Trade-off

It is very important to note that foreign policy is not formulated in a vacuum. In shaping their foreign policy goals presidents have to consider the interaction between foreign policy ideals and domestic policy goals. Apart from the obvious constraints that result in the trade-off between the two realms (such as limited funding), presidents also have to take cognisance of the

domestic political landscape. A very useful taxonomy for studying the interaction between foreign and domestic politics is the notion of a two-level game expanded upon by Robert Putnam (1988). The model, aimed at the position of those negotiating foreign policy in the international arena, is particularly relevant to the role of the president and the task at hand. In his attempt to study the interaction between foreign policy and domestic politics, Putnam (1988: 434) finds it useful to conceive the problematic as a two-level game:

> At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favourable policies, and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among those groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments.

Putnam (1988) explains that foreign policy negotiation can be conceived of as two games played at two tables, with the national political leader appearing at both tables astride the intersection of the domestic and international realms. At the international table the leader sits opposite his foreign counterparts and alongside his advisors or fellow diplomats. At the domestic table they are met by their constituencies including "parliamentary figures, spokespersons for domestic agencies, representatives of key interest groups, and the leader's own political advisors" (1988: 434). The task of the leader is to win at both games given the constraint that moves that may seem reasonable at one table may be rejected at the other. While the nature of diplomacy allows for inconsistencies in rhetoric at opposing tables, eventually a policy decision has to be made one way or the other, and this decision has to satisfy as many of the players around both tables as possible in order to be feasible.

This is particularly relevant in the US political system where presidents have to submit treaties to Congress for ratification, a problematic central to Putnam's taxonomy. The reason for this is that the two levels of Putnam's theory consist of a first level (Level I) where political leaders or negotiators reach a tentative agreement at the international table, and a second level (Level II) where the leader has to return to the second table and engage in discussions with their constituents about whether to ratify the tentative agreement. Note, however, that this is not a liner process and it can be assumed that discussions about workable proposals to take to the international table often occur prior to the onset of the negotiation process (that is to say that foreign policy is determined on the domestic front and implemented internationally subsequent to this). Nevertheless the point remains that foreign policy has to be ratified domestically; thus the metaphor is a useful analytical tool if not necessarily always descriptively accurate.

It is also important to point out that ratification is not only limited to an explicit vote by the legislature as in the US Senate. Putnam uses the term generically to refer to any formal or

informal decision-process aimed at endorsing or rejecting foreign policy. A wide spectrum of actors is thus included in this process such as bureaucratic agencies, interest groups, social classes, as well as public opinion (Putnam, 1988). In the democratic sense ratification can thus be as simple as continued support of government by the electorate, or as complex as a parliamentary vote in favour of a specific treaty or agreement. As stated earlier, foreign policy decisions can also impact on a president's prospects for re-election. The point is that ultimately the situation is such that when a politician sets out to determine foreign policy, they have to balance the needs of the international realm with the needs of the domestic realm.

2.5.2. The Power of Domestic Pressure

Stemming from the preceding discussion regarding the trade-off between domestic and foreign policy goals a secondary constraint is that of domestic pressure and public opinion. While the question of the effect of the masses on governmental elites in liberal democracies is not unique to foreign policy formulation, Risse-Kappen (1991) has focussed on this issue specifically in the context of the latter. He identifies two ways in which public opinion translates into pressure on foreign policy, namely through *domestic structures* and *coalition-building processes*.

As can be deduced from the name, domestic structures refer broadly to the "nature of the political institutions (the 'state'), basic features of the society, and the institutional and organizational arrangements linking state and society and channelling societal demands into the political system" (Risse-Kappen, 1991: 484). In other words this encompasses how political actors respond to societal demands, the latter including the mass public as well as civil society groupings and other non-governmental organisations.

One of the foremost models used to explain this in practice focuses on state institutions and the notion of *strong* versus *weak* states. This model measures the ability of state institutions to "to control society and to overcome domestic resistance" (Risse-Kappen, 1991: 484). The concept was initially explored by Katzenstein (1976) who explained that weak states are open to pressure by societal interest groups as a result of their fragmented political institutions. This cripples their ability to impose top-down policies. In contrast to weak states, strong states possess strong bureaucratic institutions and thus are able to maintain a "high degree of autonomy vis-a-vis society" (Risse-Kappen, 1991: 485).

While the weak state/strong state dichotomy is a useful analytical model it attempts to over simplify the complex political processes involved in policy formulation as it focuses only on the institutions and not the individuals and groups that populate them (Gourevitch, 1978). This

ignores the politics of personality, for example, and fails to distinguish between a president with a strong popular mandate and bipartisan aspirations (such as Barack Obama), versus one who has depleted his political capital (such as Bush during his last years in office). As a result of this short-coming, Risse-Kappen looks to the coalition-building process to better explain the effects of society on policy. The coalition-building process focuses on 'policy networks,' understood as "the mechanisms and processes of interest representation by political parties and interest groups that link the societal environment to the political systems" (Risse-Kappen, 1991: 485). In other words this model directly addresses the ability of the political leadership to build consensus in support of their policy proposals, as President Obama has attempted to do since coming into office.

Yet as with the structural approach, the coalition-building process approach does not fully account for all the variables as it effectively ignores institutional constraints. It is for this reason that Risse-Kappen, Katzenstein and Gourevitch all ended up embracing a unified approach that takes both elements into consideration. A combined reading of their work leads to the identification of three important factors in this regard: The first factor borrows from the structural approach and evaluates "the nature of the *political institutions* and the degree of their centralization" (Risse-Kappen, 1991: 486 – emphasis added). The second factor evaluates *the structure of society and societal variables* such as polarisation and homogeneity, the strength of civil society groupings and the power to mobilise public support. The third factor focuses specifically on *coalition-building processes and policy networks*: Are these *state-dominated*, *society-dominated* or *corporatist*? The first of these, the state-dominated approach, is the most exclusive and limits policy formulation to political elites. The second, the society-dominated approach, is the most inclusive of the three and is driven by public opinion. The third, the corporatist approach, reflects a process of mutual bargaining between state and society and seeks to identify policy common denominators (Risse-Kappen, 1991).

How does the US fit into this model? According to Risse-Kappen (1991), the US' foreign policy system is highly decentralised considering that the president has to contend with the structural and bureaucratic constraints detailed in the first half of this chapter. In terms of its societal structure, the US is characterised by an ideologically divided society that is generally able to mobilise itself around specific causes. A good example of this is the opposing views of the war in Iraq between conservatives and liberals in the US, with both groups being able to rally support both for and against the war respectively. Finally, the policy network in the US leans toward a society-dominated type with societal actors generally having a high degree of access to the political elites in the decision-making progress.

2.5.3. Public Opinion

The preceding exposition explains the theory behind the domestic pressure/foreign policy nexus. What it fails to do, is to fully explain the mechanisms underlying the interaction between public opinion and foreign policy, or how this has changed over the past decades. In the 1950s and 60s it was generally assumed by political scientists that public opinion did not play a significant role in foreign policy making as the public was generally uninformed and disinterested. Empirical studies conducted during this period suggested that the public did not hold coherent and consistent views on foreign policy matters and that the latter seldom served as guide for voting behaviour[17]. One of the first models to comprehensively study the link between foreign policy and public opinion was developed by James Rosenau in 1961. His model dates back to an era when there was not very high regard for the opinions of ordinary citizens and Rosenau (1961: 34), using the analogy of an audience watching a play, argued that the vast majority of citizens could "hardly grasp the plot, much less hear all the lines or distinguish between the actors." This portion of the public were denigrated to merely "setting ... the outer limits within which decision makers and opinion makers feel constrained to operate and interact" (Rosenau, 1961: 36). While this is not an insignificant position to be in, the academic view of the role of the public grew in the wake of popular opposition to the Vietnam War, which many scholars being forced to re-evaluate their stance (Powlick and Katz, 1998: 30).

More recent research into the issue revealed an entirely different perspective. As Powlick and Katz (1998: 30) point out, "[f]ew now question that American public opinion has an effect on foreign policymakers." Contrary to the view held by Rosenau, *inter alia*, emperical research now points to foriegn policy attitudes held by the public as being *stable* (Page and Shapiro, 1992), *coherent* (Wittkopf, 1990) and *informed by their core values* (Hurwitz and Peffley, 1987). The current view is that the relationship between policymakers and the public is reciprocal in nature: "Leaders try to educate or manipulate public opinion as many elite-based models contend, but decision makers also are sensitive to the preferences of the electorate" (Powlick and Katz, 1998: 30).

In order to understand this reciprocal process and the mechanism whereby it translates into public influence on foreign policy it is necessary to understand that public opinion on foreign policy is *latent* and only comes to the fore when *activated*. In this context, the latent nature of public opinion refers to its origin in "ingrained sets of values, criteria for judgment, attitudes, preferences [and] dislikes ... that come into play when a relevant action, event, or proposal

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[17] See Holsti, 1996: 26-37

arises" (Key, 1964: 264). In other words, these opinions stem from long term socialisation and are less frivolous than previously thought. That does not mean they are not volatile, however, as they can change depending on how issues are framed. This occurs when opinions become activated.

The activation of public opinion occurs when issues are forced in the public spotlight, most often through public debate by foreign policy elites. Note that this does not only include political elites but rather four groups (Powlick and Katz, 1998): (1) actors within the executive branch of government, (2) members of both houses of Congress, (3) representative of interest groups, and (4) political pundits from the media, academia and other relevant institutions. When public debate over foreign policy takes place among these elites, the attention of the public is focussed on the issue being debated. This results in their opinion of the issue becoming activated, with them shaping their opinion based on the direction of the debate. The latter includes the concept of framing, whereby the elites can shape public opinion through how they present a certain issue in the public sphere:

> To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation...

> (Entman, 1993: 52)

An example of this would be the propaganda campaign by the Bush administration to frame the War on Terror and the invasion of Iraq as a war for freedom and democracy in Iraq, and the issue of WMDs with regard to the national security of the US.

The main shortcoming of the preceding argument is that it only relates to the effect of domestic public opinion on presidential agency. There is, of course, an international dimension to public opinion that is equally relevant for this thesis. If one is measuring Obama's level of presidential agency in foreign policy, it is important to take into account how international perceptions and opinions of his administration can impact on this. Unlike domestic public opinion, this is not a field that has received a great deal of attention. Similarly to domestic opinion, however, it is important for US presidents to have the support of the international community if they are to be successful in certain foreign policy endeavours. In both cases, it is important that presidents are able to shape public opinion to mitigate its constraining effect. The ability to do so is thus an important informal power and will be explored in section 3.1.4, with Obama's utilisation thereof being evaluated in section 5.1.4.

3. Informal Powers, Personality and Foreign Policy

The purpose of the previous chapter was to provide an overview of the formal powers held by the president that allow him to shape foreign policy. Considering that these remain largely constant from one administration to the next they do not allow us to explain why some presidents are better at accomplishing foreign policy goals than others. The reason for this is that apart from the formal powers held by the president, there are a multitude of other factors that play a role in determining the level of agency. The focus of this thesis, however, is on the president as an *individual*, and not on the larger foreign policy machinery. For this reason we will only be focussing on two additional factors that relate directly to individual presidential agency – namely how presidents overcome the constraints on their agency through the use of *informal presidential powers,* and the effect of personality on the utilisation of their formal powers with specific regard to how it is reflected in their *worldview*.

Unlike the formal powers held by the president, the informal powers are not conferred on him by the Constitution but stem instead from convention and customary practice. Moreover, whereas the constitutionally conferred powers remain constant from one administration to the next, informal powers differ greatly between presidents depending on both their willingness and ability to utilise them. Presidents who are adept at doing so, however, can greatly increase their influence over foreign policy. It is for this reason that Jentleson (2004: 39) argues that "in many respects even more important than a president's formal executive powers are the informal political powers of the office and the skills of being a practiced politician." Similarly, Jervis (1976) has emphasised the importance of understanding a president's worldview, stating that "it is often impossible to explain crucial decisions and policies without reference to the decision-makers' beliefs about the world and their image of others."

It is one of the central contentions of this thesis that it is these informal powers and the president's worldview that serve to distinguish great foreign policy presidents from mediocre ones, and that it is the utilisation of these that will potentially enable the Obama administration to succeed in its ambition foreign policy agenda. It must be noted, however, that the purpose of this chapter is not to give an overview of all the various informal powers held by US presidents, or the multitude of preferences and beliefs that form part of a president's worldview. Instead it aims to set out a framework consisting of five broad criteria that a president must meet in order to have any real success in shaping foreign policy. This set of criteria has been abstracted from the various informal powers identified by scholars, as well as the common traits found in presidents considered to be successful diplomats. The five criteria include the following

prerequisites that president must adhere to: (1) a favourable disposition to foreign affairs; (2) the ability to provide strong leadership in policy formulation; (3) a command over Pennsylvania Avenue politics; (4) the utilisation of the role of public opinion maker; (5) and the utilisation of the role of global statesmen. The next section will set out each in depth.

3.1. Personal Prerequisites for Presidential Agency in Foreign Policy

3.1.1. Favourable Disposition to Foreign Affairs

In the previous chapter we discussed how presidents are faced with a trade-off between domestic and foreign policy that require them to prioritise their time and resources. Apart from the notion that they cannot always do both, there is the more personal issue of which field they aspire to engage with. Formally, presidents have to balance their domestic and foreign policy goals and this balance serves as a constraint on both. Informally, however, it is often the prerogative of the president whether he seeks to pursue any foreign policy goals whatsoever. Barring external events that force their hand, some presidents simply do not choose to engage actively with the foreign policy sphere.

A recent and poignant example of this is the presidency of George W Bush. Prior to the events of 9/11, Bush was regarded as an inexperienced foreign policy president with little affect for foreign affairs, multilateralism and international institutions (Dumbrell, 2002). Post-9/11, however, the focus of Bush's administration became the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. It is important to note, however, that this is not merely a matter of *focus*, but of *attitude and disposition*. The fact that a president is forced to engage on the international front does not equate to him wanting to do so. It is this ambition to be a successful foreign policy president that is important for our purposes as it underlies the broader objectives of any given administration. The president must set the tone for how the administration aims to approach foreign policy as a goal.

Of course it would be unfair to suggest that presidents who do not enter the White House with an ambition to shape foreign policy are precluded from doing so successfully. Bush had immense impact on US foreign policy. Arguably, however, he would have been more successful in addressing some of the backlash directed at his reaction to 9/11 if he had been more attuned to the wider foreign policy implications thereof. Ultimately Bush prioritised US national security and its domestic implications when he invaded Iraq. His focus was not on the international community and the opinions of the US allies – this was largely a legitimising afterthought – but on the impact that terrorism could have on the domestic security of the US. In this regard the disposition to foreign policy is reflective of a president's worldview insofar as their belief about

the role the US should play in the global order will influence how they approach foreign policy. Presidents with tendencies toward isolationism or non-interventionism, for example, might shy away from active involvement in foreign affairs, while those who believe in multilateralism will no doubt engage heavily on the international front.

3.1.2. Strong Leadership in Policy Formulation

In order to appreciate the significance of strong presidential leadership in foreign policy formulation it is first necessary to understand the basics of the process itself. A useful tool in this regard is the concentric circles model of policy formulation, initially conceived by Roger Hilsman (1967), and well expounded by Wittkopf, Jones and Kegley (2008). The model places the president at the core of the policy formulation process and then places the various other bodies responsible for shaping foreign policy in a set of concentric circles around the president, with each circle having increasingly less power over the president as it moves away from the core.

The first circle, or the core, contains the president, his advisors – such as the National Security Advisor – and various political appointees, such as the Secretaries of State, Defence and Homeland Security. These are the individuals who have the most interaction with the president on a day to day basis and subsequently the greatest ability to influence his decisions on foreign policy. Obama's selection of advisors, and his interaction with them, will be evaluated in section 5.1.2. The second circle contains the executive branch and the various departments and agencies. While the increased distance from the president means that they do not have day to day influence over policy formulation, they are responsible for both providing information relevant to policy formulation, as well as taking responsibility for its implementation. The departments and agencies are generally staffed by career professionals who remain constant from one administration to the next. The constraint this places on a president's ability to achieve his foreign policy goals was pointed out in chapter 2. Finally, the outer circle contains Congress, interest groups, the public and mass media. While Congress has specific duties related to foreign policy as discussed in chapter 2, they have almost no influence on the daily decisions taken by the president. Interest groups, the public and mass media, on the contrary, have no duties with regard to foreign policy but have a limited ability to apply pressure on the administration. This pressure can impact on the foreign policy course taken by the president if he is unable to resist or manage it successfully. The representation of the process of a set of expanding concentric circles thus has the effect that the most important decisions are made by the president, while those further away from him have increasingly less power as their distance from the president increases (Wittkopf, Jones and Kegley, 2008).

Following from this conceptualisation, it becomes important to take cognisance of the way the president interacts with his advisors as these are the individuals with the highest degree of influence over the president and foreign policy. Richard Johnson (1974) has identified three different models for how presidents manage their staff and policy making duties. The *formalistic model* depends on clear lines of authority and a respect for the hierarchy of roles within the policy formulation process. This allows for the president to delegate responsibility and rely on his appointed advisors and their specific skills. Truman, Eisenhower, Nixon and Reagan are generally considered to be examples of presidents who utilise the formalistic model (Hermann and Preston, 1994). The *competitive model* moves away from the strict hierarchy of the formalistic model towards a confrontational model where advisors are encouraged to deliberate over competing opinions. This allows for greater involvement from the president who weighs up the various opinions from a wide variety of perspectives and subsequently derives his point of view. Franklin Roosevelt is noted as utilising this model (Hermann and Preston, 1994). The third model, the *collegial model*, is similar to the competitive model but emphasises team work and consensus building over competition between the presidential advisors with the president at the centre of the process. Kennedy, Carter and George H.W. Bush are examples of presidents who exhibited the latter style (Hermann and Preston, 1994). Wittkopf, Kegley and Scott add the *corporate, or CEO model* (admittedly a variant of the formalistic model) to this typology in order to explain Bush's heavy reliance on delegation of "authority and control of details" while he focuses on the bigger picture (Wittkopf, Kegley and Scott, 2003).

Building on Johnson's work, Alexander George (1980; 1988) identified three stylistic variables responsible for determining which model is utilised. The first is the president's *cognitive style* and refers to the way he processes information during decision making. Some presidents come to the White House with a predetermined set of values and beliefs that shape the agenda he sets out to accomplish, while others prefer to evaluate and analyse the political context before determining a foreign policy direction. The second variable is the president's *sense of efficacy*. Simply stated, presidents prefer to tackle problems they feel comfortable with. While some presidents feel at home in the foreign policy realm, others prefer to concentrate on domestic issues. George H.W. Bush, for example, served as director as the CIA prior to his election and came to the White House with significant foreign policy credentials. The third variable relates to the president's *orientation toward political conflict*. This refers to whether the president is comfortable with disagreement and dissenting opinion among his advisors, or whether he prefers to avoid conflict. Presidents such as Franklin Roosevelt believed that conflict among his advisors was a good thing as it allowed for the development of new ideas, while

presidents such as Nixon avoided conflict as he believed it had the potential to undermine him. Depending on their openness to conflict the president will lean toward either a competitive, or collegial model. As Preston and Hermann (2004: 79) note, "it helps define the type of control the president will want over the policy making process."

In comparison to the George model, Preston and Hermann (2004) developed a model that explains how presidents shape their advisory systems depending on three factors: (1) their *desire to become involved in and control* the policy making process; (2) their desire for information and their *sensitivity to the political context* in which foreign policy decisions are made; (3) their *past experience and expertise* in the foreign policy domain. The first factor, control over the policy process, refers to the president's need to have their will prevail and is determinate of their level of perseverance with regard to specific foreign policy goals. The second factors, sensitivity to the political context, relates to the type of information a president will seek out and utilise in shaping their policies. Do they come to the White House with predetermined ideas about how the world works, or do they attempt to understand and take into account its changing nature. The third factor, past experience and expertise, generally determines the degree to which presidents become personally involved in foreign affairs. Presidents with less experience often shy away from foreign policy issues as they feel less comfortable with them.

3.1.3. Command Over Pennsylvania Avenue Politics

In section 2.4 the notion that presidential-congressional relations can be a constraint on presidential agency was discussed, insofar as a divided government will make it more difficult for a president to achieve his policy goals. The relationship between the president and Congress is thus a significant factor in determining a president's agency.

Given the various powers or responsibilities conferred on both the president and Congress, as well as how partisan considerations come into play, Jentleson (2004) argues that are four patterns of presidential-congressional relations: *cooperation*, where Congress has been supportive of the president and either concurred with, or at least deferred to his agenda; *constructive compromise*, where differences between the two branches have been positively resolved resulting in a more favourable position than that initially held by either party; *institutional competition*, where conflict has been less the result of policy content than a power struggle between the executive branch and congressional oversight; and *confrontation*, where there has been substantial conflict and tension between the executive and legislative branches.

The point that needs to be emphasised is that the particular pattern that takes hold, as well as how a president deals with divided government, is what ultimately impacts on presidential

agency and their ability to implement their foreign policy goals. Abstracting from Ceaser and DiSalvo (2006), one can argue that this depends to a large extent on the personality of the president and how he deals with conflict and dissention. The president has to have the personality and political prowess in order to win congressional approval, especially in the event of a divided government. Jentleson (2004: 39) concurs with this assessment and refers to the behind-the-scenes deal-making that is often required by presidents in order to win over members of Congress to get the votes they need to ratify treaties or pass legislation. He notes the example of President Reagan who won Senate approval for an arms deal with Saudi Arabia by "dol[ing] out funds for a new hospital in the state of one senator, a coal-fired power plant for another, and a US attorney appointment for a friend of another."

3.1.4. Utilisation of Role as Public Opinion Maker

> People always used to say of me that I was an astonishingly good politician and divined what the people are going to think. ... I did not 'divine' how the people were going to think; I simply made up my mind what they ought to think, and then did my best to get them to think it.
>
> (President Theodore 'Teddy' Roosevelt in Jentleson, 2004: 39)

In chapter 2 the mechanism whereby public opinion can serve as a constraint on foreign policy was studied, leading to the conclusion that the relationship between policy formulators and the public is reciprocal in nature. Particularly important to this process is the activation of public opinion through various channels, one of which is by the executive branch of government via the media. The president is central to this process. In the words of Seymour Lipset (1966: 20): "The President makes opinion, he does not follow it. The polls tell him how good a politician he is."

Through the press office of the White House, the president, as the focal point of US politics, enjoys direct access to the media. A president with good communication skills, and who is comfortable in front of television cameras or in other public settings, thus has great potential to direct and shape public opinion on political issues both foreign and domestic. The reason for this is that the president and his dealings are newsworthy *per se*, providing an "inherent advantage" with regard to the aforementioned (Snow, 2005: 95). This privileged position in the media, and the power it presents, is what Teddy Roosevelt referred to as the "bully pulpit" (Jentleson, 2004: 39). One president who understood this power well was Franklin Roosevelt. In fact, his attitude toward public opinion can best be described as "intensely practical" (Steele, 1974: 195). He clearly understood the need to shape public opinion and to use his influence to garner support for his own policies, or attack those of his opponents. Starting in the Great Depression, Roosevelt delivered a series of thirty evening radio addresses to the public During March of 1933 and June

of 1944. These addresses were known as his 'fireside chats'. Since Roosevelt, every president – notably Reagan and Clinton – has made use of this informal method of communication to varying degrees through radio addresses of their own (Han, 2006; Rowland and Jones, 2002; Sigelmanm and Whissell, 2002). While a full discussion of Obama's use of public opinion will be undertaken in section 5.1.4, it is worth nothing that he has taken this custom a step further by presenting his weekly address as a video available via the White House website and on YouTube (YouTube, 2010; White House, 2010d).

The advantage of this is not only limited to directing media focus but can also be used to put pressure on Congress to capitulate to the White House on contentious matters, or allow the president to frame issues in a certain light (Han, 2006). Depending on what the President wants to accomplish he can publicise or spin issues to a much greater extent than any other arm of government. This is a very powerful tool in shaping foreign policy where perceptions of US actions and intentions are often more important than the actions themselves.

In the previous chapter it was also noted the public opinion has an international dimension, and that there is a great need to harness international public opinion and good will in order to increase presidential agency. As President Lyndon B. Johnson (quoted in Bibby, 1957: 1) stated with regard to the war in Vietnam, "the ultimate victory will depend upon the hearts and the minds of the people who actually live out there." The ability to shape international public opinion is thus equally important as shaping domestic public opinion, albeit for slightly different reasons. Both facets thereof will be studied with regard to Obama's level of agency in section 5.1.4.

3.1.5. Utilisation of Role as a Global Statesmen

One of the greatest powers that the president of the US enjoys in shaping public policy is the power he wields as a global statesman. Snow (2005) refers to this as *presidential singularity*. In comparison to Congress, one of the greatest advantages that the president enjoys is that he is the only political official elected by the entire nation. The implication of this is that whereas Congress is a largely faceless entity comprised of 535 members from various constituencies, the president is the universally recognisable leader of the American people. When this power is utilised by a president who recognises both its significance, as well as that of the formal position of chief of state, it possesses unsurpassed potential to shape foreign policy. This is especially true in times of crisis when the American people need a single leader to turn to. This was certainly the case in the wake of the 9/11 attacks when the American people turned to President Bush for leadership and it is now the case as the country looks to President Obama for change.

On the international stage this provides the president with unequal personal power to shape US foreign policy and diplomacy, a role that has become an increasingly large part of the presidency. With the advances in aviation and the development of Air Force One as a flying White House, the increasingly frequent overseas visits of the US president have become a widely publicised and important way of spreading pro-US propaganda. There are a number of examples of this phenomenon in recent history. Two oft cited examples are that of President John F. Kennedy's 1963 visit to Berlin and his 'Ich bin ein Berliner' speech expressing US solidarity with the people of West Germany, and Ronald Reagan's famous exhortation regarding the Berlin wall delivered in front of Brandenburg Gate, West Berlin in 1987: "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" (BBC News, 2005; Kennedy, 1963; Reagan, 1987)

In order to illustrate the power of US presidents to shape foreign policy through their mere presence and position, it is interesting to investigate one of the manifestations thereof – presidential doctrines. Presidential doctrines are not legally binding or legitimised by the Constitution. Often, in fact, they are not even formally codified or recorded, but are merely stated in the course of speeches or statements delivered by the president, or what Jentleson (2004: 36) refers to as *declaratory commitments*. That notwithstanding, presidential doctrines provide a very specific framework within foreign policy is formulated and executed. Per illustration, at least seven examples of presidential doctrines can be noted in fairly recent history, including those propounded by Presidents Truman (ideological anticommunism in post-war US foreign policy); Eisenhower & Carter (US interests in the Middle East); Reagan (the decision to actively seek the undoing of communism in third world outposts) and George W. Bush (pre-emptive and unilateral warfare to secure the US against terrorism) (Snow, 2005). Despite their non-binding nature, Snow (2005: 97) points out that in most cases presidential doctrines are accepted simply because failure or hesitation to do so would be to publicly question the president and subsequently to "present an image of national disarray."

3.2. Framework for Analysis

The purpose of this chapter has been to develop a framework according to which Obama's level of presidential agency can be measured. To recap briefly, the framework consists of five prerequisites that president must adhere to if they are to achieve significant foreign policy agency. These include (1) a favourable disposition to foreign affairs; (2) the ability to provide strong leadership in policy formulation; (3) a command over Pennsylvania Avenue politics; (4) the utilisation of the role of public opinion maker; (5) and the utilisation of the role of global statesmen.

The first factor simply measures the presidents desire to become involved in foreign policy matters based on the assumption that those who shy away from becoming actively involved generally do not accomplish very much. Obama's disposition to foreign policy will be evaluated in section 5.1.1.

The second factor measures the president's ability to translate a desire to become involved in foreign affairs into actionable foreign policy. Without the ability to transform ideas into actions the president has little hope of achieving his agenda. Obama's leadership over the policy formulation process will be evaluated in section 5.1.2.

The third factor measures the president's ability to work with Congress in getting his foreign policy approved. In section 2.2 the formal foreign policy powers of Congress were discussed and how these can constrain a president's options; in section 5.1.3 Obama's ability to utilise his personal attributes in order to mitigate these constraints will be evaluated.

The fourth factor measures the president's ability to shape public opinion on foreign policy matters. In section 2.5.3 the idea that public opinion can constrain a president's ability to achieve foreign policy goals was discussed. A president who is able to shape public opinion, however, can overcome this constraint and build coalitions to advance his goals. The same applies for international public opinion with regard to perceptions of US leadership. In section 5.1.4 Obama's unique ability to shape public opinion will be evaluated, and the potential this has to provide him with an advantage in achieving his desire to renew US leadership.

Finally, the fifth factor evaluates a president's ability to utilise his office to actively shape international events. This is similar to his ability to shape public opinion but instead focuses on his interaction with foreign governments and international organisations. Given Obama's stated preference for multilateralism it is important to evaluate his stature as a global statesman, as will be done in section 5.1.5.

4. Obama's Foreign Policy

4.1. Introduction and Methodology

At the beginning of this thesis the point was made that the task at hand is not to give an exhaustive overview of Obama's foreign policy. Instead the task is to measure his potential agency and ability to fulfil his desire to renew US leadership abroad, and re-establish the US as a moral leader when it comes to foreign affairs. Regardless of this, a cursory overview of Obama's broad foreign policy agenda is necessary insofar as specific goals may require a specific approach in order to achieve them. In order to determine Obama's potential agency, one therefore has to have at least a basic understanding of what it is that he would like to accomplish. Achieving that understanding is the aim of this chapter.

Before this study is undertaken it is prudent to make a number of points regarding the methodology that will be used to identify Obama's foreign policy goals, as well as to measure his potential agency in chapter 5. In the preceding chapters it was shown that no single body is exclusively responsible for formulating, promulgating and executing foreign policy. The process involves a number of actors involved in different ways and at different stages. While the president may make a declaratory commitment on a certain issue, the process of translating that commitment into actual foreign policy is great deal more complex. Take, for example, Obama's statements regarding his initial 16 month timeline for withdrawing US troops from Iraq (DeYoung, 2009). As commander in chief of the armed forces, Obama has the authority to make such statements, but it is the responsibility of the Department of Defence to ultimately make this happen. For this reason it is rather difficult to identify a single, primary source for everything that can be placed under the umbrella term of US foreign policy. Having said that, the main actor relevant to this thesis is Obama, and the focus is on his agency. For that reason this thesis will rely predominantly on Obama's stated foreign policy goals while using other sources – such as the State Department and Defence Department documents – in a supportive capacity.

The same problem with identifying a single source for US foreign policy *per se,* exists with identifying a single source for what can be considered to be Obama's foreign policy agenda. This thesis will thus evaluate information from three main sources. The first source will consist of Obama's *statements and utterances* on the issue. In the run-up to his election, and since coming to office, Obama has delivered a plethora of speeches, written numerous opinion pieces and taken part in a large number of interviews. Many of these addressed the issue of foreign policy, both directly and indirectly, and will therefore be indispensible in determining Obama's attitude and disposition toward foreign policy. It must also be noted that not all of these are primary

sources, as some of Obama's more informal remarks have merely been reported on in secondary sources. This makes them no less relevant as informal remarks can be just as telling about Obama's agenda as statements issued by his office and advisors, especially considering that the latter are carefully scripted and do not always reflect Obama's more personal views.

The second source will be Obama's *actions* while in office. Almost half-way through his term, Obama has now had ample opportunity to establish his policy agenda. This thesis will thus be looking at Obama's policy history since coming to the White House. Again it will reply on both primary and secondary sources, studying both official White House releases as well as reports on these by the media, academics and political analysts. While the first source, Obama's statements, is important for gauging his disposition and agenda with regard to various issues, the second source, Obama's actions, is important for determining whether this has translated into tangible foreign policy. Finally, a third source – *supporting documents* from the White House, other departments and agencies – will be indispensible to better understanding the gap between stated goals and real-world accomplishments.

Apart from merely identifying Obama's foreign policy goals and accomplishments, this thesis is also interested in the global *perception* of them. Considering that this thesis aims to evaluate Obama's effort to remake US foreign policy it is particularly relevant to study how that effort has been perceived internationally. While the White House may list a number of accomplishments related to the Iraqi war, for example, these may not have had any real impact on how US foreign policy is viewed in the eyes of the world. In the eyes of the critics of the US, Obama's accomplishments may simply be written off as 'too little, too late.' For this reason a fourth source that will be utilised in this chapter is *commentary from the global arena*. Prior to his election, the global media were very positive about Obama's presidency and had high hopes for the change he could bring to the world. The question is whether any of this has been realised and whether Obama is still held in such high esteem.

4.2. Obama's Foreign Policy

In looking at Obama's foreign policy this thesis will concentrate on three main areas, namely (1) the *guiding principles* he employs in his approach to foreign affairs; (2) his *accomplishments* to date; and (3) his *future goals*.

4.2.1. Guiding Principles

Obama has been clear about the guiding principles he seeks to employ in his approach to foreign policy, both in terms of specific issues (such as the War on Terror), as well as his general worldview. Chapter 3 emphasised the importance of understanding a president's worldview in

order to understand why they make the decisions they do and it with this aspect that the inquiry will begin.

In October of 2002, when Obama was nothing more than a state senator in Illinois, he made a speech against the war in Iraq that essentially established his view on the events that would unfold over years to come. Obama (2002 – empahsis added) was clear: "I am not opposed to *all* wars. I'm opposed to *dumb* wars." Obama's argument was simple; while acknowledging that Saddam Hussein was a brutal dictator, Obama was adamant that Hussein posed no "imminent and direct threat to the United States, or to his neighbours." The US had more pressing matters to deal with, both foreign and domestic, than to become embroiled in a war that, *even if successful*, would "require a US occupation of undetermined length, at undetermined cost, with undetermined consequences." Moreover, a war in Iraq would "only fan the flames of the Middle East, … and strengthen the recruitment arm of Al Qaeda" (Obama, 2002).

In retrospect Obama's remarks were near prophetic in their assessment of the course the war would follow. Apart from simply opposing the war, however, Obama posed an alternative that showed a deeper insight into the cause of the problems facing US national security and how to address them. Obama (2002) called on Bush to "finish the fight with Bin Laden and Al Qaeda, through effective, coordinated intelligence, and a shutting down of the financial networks that support terrorism, and a homeland security program that involves more than color-coded warnings." Furthermore, Obama (2002) called for diplomatic, multilateral solutions to the problems posed by international terrorism and Iraq, such as ensuring that UN weapon inspectors could "do their work," enforcing a non-proliferation treaty, and aiding Russia in safeguarding and eliminating their nuclear stockpiles. Obama (2002) even went so far as to introduce the notion of energy security as part of national security, by calling on the US to wean itself off Middle Eastern oil, "through an energy policy that doesn't simply serve the interests of Exxon and Mobil." Obama's (2002) closing remarks summed up his stance and set the tone of Hope for his presidential campaign: "Those are the battles that we need to fight. Those are the battles that we willingly join. The battles against ignorance and intolerance. Corruption and greed. Poverty and despair."

Many of the principles Obama extolled during his speech against the war in Iraq were echoed during his campaign. A good, comprehensive source for this wider worldview is the essay Obama wrote for *Foreign Affairs* in July of 2007. In this essay, pointedly entitled *Renewing American Leadership*, Obama (2007b) laid out his view on US foreign policy.

Firstly, as with his speech on Iraq, Obama believes that the fight to secure the American people should not be waged at the expense of the moral leadership of the US. Obama believes in the notion of "common security for our common humanity" and argues in favour of tackling the problem of US security through multilateralism and the common security of the free world. Moreover, Obama (2007b) contextualises common security in the concept of common humanity, by virtue of which he calls on the US to return to the post-WWII years where the US provided "visionary leadership" to the world in addressing social issues as well as security issues. This is partly in reaction to the Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib controversies that rocked Bush's administration in its final years. The idea that the US had to resort to enhanced interrogation techniques and abandon civil rights and liberties in order to guarantee its security was a highly contentious one during the presidential campaign in 2008, and one that Obama (2007b) rejected outright as a false dichotomy. Obama has made it clear that the ends are just as important as the means; while Obama promised to keep the US secure, he vowed to take a more measured approach to do so. Moreover, Obama aims to extend the same democratic freedoms held dear by the American people to the rest of the world, and aid in the fight against global poverty and disease. As Obama (2007b) states, "[the US] need[s] to invest in building capable, democratic states that can establish healthy and educated communities, develop markets, and generate wealth."

Secondly, Obama emphasises the value of diplomacy as opposed to military power, especially with regard to the Middle East and potential threats such as Iran and Syria. Obama (2007b) believes in using diplomacy as his central tool in foreign policy, "backed by the whole range of instruments of American power – political, economic, and military." Obama also states a willingness to talk directly to Iran about their nuclear capabilities in stark contrast to the policy of the Bush administration to cut off diplomatic ties with states considered to be enemies of the US. This is a point that will be returned to in section 5.1.5.

Thirdly, while stating a preference for diplomacy, Obama does not reject the use of military power, and instead calls for an expansion and modernisation of the armed forces. While stating that he would "not hesitate to use force, unilaterally if necessary, to protect the American people or our vital interests whenever we are attacked or imminently threatened," Obama (2007b) further believes that in those cases where military power is the only course of action, the US "should make every effort to garner the clear support and participation of others."

Obama's fourth guiding principle is related to this latter point – a rejuvenation of the US' alliances. This includes rebuilding its old alliances with European countries and NATO, and

fostering new alliances with relevant regional and global powers such as China, Brazil, India, Nigeria, and South Africa. Ultimately, Obama (2007b) would like to restore global trust in the US, an ideal he summates in the closing of his essay: "This is our moment to renew the trust and faith of our people – and all people – in an America that battles immediate evils, promotes an ultimate good, and leads the world once more."

Halfway into his term, Obama's administration has distilled these views into four guiding principles for his foreign policy, promulgated by the White House (2010a) via their website. Firstly, Obama is committed to ensuring the safety of the American people. Secondly, he aims to do this while rejecting the trade-off between a safe US and a morally grounded US. Thirdly, Obama would like to take a bipartisan approach to policy formulation and work with Congress instead of against it. Finally, Obama commits to engaging with his enemies on the diplomatic front prior to engaging with them on the military front. While these four principles reflect what Obama has been arguing since announcing his candidacy, the question is whether they have translated in actions and deeds.

While a fully-fledged ideological analysis of Obama's guiding principles falls beyond the scope of this thesis, it is worth nothing that there is a definite tension within his foreign policy between idealism and realism. On the one hand, Obama's foreign policy has a clearly idealistic undertone insofar as he has a normative agenda he would like to achieve. Obama has stated his desire to shape the world through the exportation of US values and ideals. On the other hand, however, he has toned back his rhetoric on human rights issues and democracy in the Middle East and China, favouring economic and security considerations instead (this will be expanded upon in the next section). This tension is thus particularly evident in the two faces of Obama's foreign policy – the one devoted to restoring the US' moral leadership, and the other devoted to securing the US' interests and security. In many ways, Bush faced the same dilemma although his pursuit of democracy was often more aggressive than it should have been (Mazarr, 2003). To complicate matters further, Obama's guiding principles also reflect a neoliberal undercurrent insofar as his philosophy of common security and common humanity suggests a belief in absolute gains within a positive-sum game.

4.2.2. Accomplishments to Date

The tension between Obama's long-term agenda to remake the US' image, and the reality posed by the international status quo at the time of his election, is also evident in the list of his accomplishments to date. A good starting point for these is the list available on the Foreign Policy page of the White House website. While this is by no means an exhaustive list, it is a

particularly relevant one as it lists the achievements the White House, and by extension Obama's administration, believes to be its most noteworthy. The White House (2010a) lists eight policy accomplishments since January of 2009. These include (1) the closure of the prison and Guantanamo Bay and the review of the US' policies relating to detention, interrogation and torture in the post-9/11 era; (2) the appoint of Special Envoys for Climate Change, Southwest Asia, the Middle East, Sudan, and a Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan; (3) the announcement of a plan to bring the war in Iraq to an end; (4) new strategies for dealing with Pakistan and Afghanistan; (5) the announcement of a new strategy to cope with the international nuclear threat; (6) the decision to negotiate a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with Russia; (7) the establishment of renewed strategic and economic dialogues with China; (8) and a new policy with regards to Cuba.

What is particularly revealing about the list is that the eight accomplishments can be broadly divided into the same two categories that emerge when studying Obama's guiding principles: those related to the regeneration of morally grounded US foreign policy, and those related to more traditional national security issues and the threats posed by the US' enemies. Importantly, the White House list echoes the foreign policy goals that Obama set during his presidential campaign, but reinforces the assessment that Obama's view is still very much grounded in a conventional understanding of foreign affairs. To refer back to his 2007 essay, it is noteworthy that Obama focussed almost entirely on physical or military threats to the US; while touching briefly on climate change, famine and disease pandemics, the largest part of his essay is related to reforming the military arm of the US in order to provide renewed global leadership. Furthermore, Obama (2007b) identified a conventional military threat as the most pressing to national security:

> To renew American leadership in the world, we must confront the most urgent threat to the security of America and the world – the spread of nuclear weapons, material, and technology and the risk that a nuclear device will fall into the hands of terrorists.

It follows that while Obama may possess a more moderate disposition in how he would like to tackle foreign policy and address the issue of national security, he is still inclined to view it in the first instance as a military-political problem. This once again reflects the tension between realism and idealism in Obama's foreign policy, as he seems to be forced toward taking a more realistic stance on conventional security issues regardless of his broader idealistic leanings. It is debatable whether this is a result of (1) the constraint he faces with regard to the pre-existing foreign policy agenda set by the Bush administration, (2) the international context during his campaign and once in office, or (3) an autonomous decision or belief on his part. This latter

point is important as Obama's foreign policy agenda is naturally wider than his actual accomplishments to date. These accomplishment, however, have been highly subject to limitations imposed on his options by the legacy left by the Bush administration. Obama came to the White House at a time when the US was embroiled in wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan and under continued threat from radical Islamic terrorists. Every president enters the White House with a number of unresolved issues to address, and the same held for Obama. In the run-up to the election, the majority of the questions posed to Obama regarding foreign policy related to his stance on these pre-existing issues. The salience of these issues explains why he dealt with them first on taking office.

Of course the White House can be expected to overstate Obama's accomplishments and underplay his failures. It is prudent, therefore, to compare this list with independent sources in order to gauge how Obama's accomplishments on foreign policy are rated by those outside his administration.

O'Hanlon (2010) argues that Obama had "a solid first year in foreign policy matters," ranking him in the best four presidents since WWII. O'Hanlon describes Obama's foreign policy decisions during his first-year as "relatively pragmatic" in comparison to his campaign rhetoric, and while acknowledging that his list of accomplishments is short, he argues that Obama's accomplishments "are more in the realm of creating good inputs to policy rather than achieving good outputs." Interestingly, O'Hanlon praised Obama for setting aside his campaign promise to withdraw from Iraq within 16 months of his inauguration in favour of a phased withdrawal over an extended period. While president's often get criticised for abandoning their campaign promises, O'Hanlon prefers to see these deviations in the light of a president who is able to judge the international situation and make the necessary decisions to address the issues. In O'Hanlon's (2010) words:

> [M]y solid assessment of [Obama's] first year in office is not based on his words, or vision of hope and change, so much as sound policy decisions. … [F]or for his poise, his deliberateness, his ability to juggle numerous issues, and most of all the quality of his decisions, Obama is off to a very solid start.

Taking a more critical stance toward Obama's first year in office, Henry Nau (2010: 33) points out how Obama's pragmatism has resulted in him "deliberatively mut[ing] the rhetoric of democracy and human rights in favour of fixing global problems." Nau accuses Obama of abandoning the democratic project and argues that Obama's pragmatism has resulted in a foreign policy that prefers *fixing* the world to *shaping* it. Obama has shown a pragmatic willingness to deal with nations that do not meet the high moral standards he often extols, if doing so will result

in progress on matters such as disarmament, economic recovery, climate change, and non-proliferation. In support of this view, Nau references Obama's policies on Russia and China, *inter alia*, where Obama dialled back his criticism of human rights issues in these countries to emphasise the need for co-operation between the US, Russia and China in order to solve shared global problems. This stance was particularly evident when Hillary Clinton visited China on Obama's behest, where she was widely criticised for not taking a harsher stance against China's human rights track record (CNN, 2009; Kessler, 2009b). In reference to human rights issues in China, Clinton (quoted in CNN, 2009) had the following to say:

> Successive administrations and Chinese governments have been poised back and forth on these issues, and we have to continue to press them. But our pressing on those issues can't interfere with the global economic crisis, the global climate change crisis, and the security crisis.

The reduction in Obama's human rights and pro-democratic rhetoric has not gone unnoticed abroad. Ayman Nour, a prominent opposition leader in Egypt, criticised Obama's administration for taking a softer tone with the Mubarak government, stating that "[Obama's] reduced talk of democracy is giving these non-democratic regimes the security that they won't face pressure. And that's having a negative impact on democracy in the Arab world" (Nour quoted in Raghavan, 2009). Similarly, Gamal Eid (quoted in Raghavan, 2009), executive director of the Arabic Network for Human Rights, echoes Nau's view on Obama's pragmatism stating that "…America is concerned more about stability than democracy."

This begs an interesting question. Has Obama abandoned his desire to re-establish the US' moral leadership in favour of pragmatic policies aimed at achieving more tangible goals? Or has he redefined his understanding of moral leadership to one that ranks cultural differences and state sovereignty above the expansion of democracy and liberal freedoms in states where they are lacking? One could make a case for the latter using Obama's words as a basis. In a speech aimed at the Muslim world, delivered by Obama in Cairo in June of 2009, he had the following to say:

> I know there has been controversy about the promotion of democracy in recent years … . So let me be clear: No system of government can or should be imposed by one nation by any other. … America does not presume to know what is best for everyone (Obama, 2009c).

One could argue against this view, however, by giving Obama credit for toning back the rhetoric in order to build bridges. A pragmatic Obama might believe it necessary to first regain the trust of the Muslim world in the wake of the damage done by the Bush administration – a goal that will not be realised through continued criticism and intervention – in order to achieve a longer-term human rights agenda, *inter alia*.

Conjecture aside, questions remain surrounding Obama's long term-plans that can only be answered through evaluating his agenda. Now that he has been in office for two years, Obama has had more time to develop his own goals for US foreign policy and it will become increasingly evident how his personal views will affect the future thereof. In the next section the focus will thus be on the road ahead and how Obama plans to shape his foreign policy in the future.

4.2.3. Future Goals

One of the most important components of Obama's future foreign policy is the National Security Strategy (NSS) (White House, 2010b), released May 27, 2010. The purpose of this document is to lay out "a strategic approach for advancing American interests, including the security of the American people, a growing U.S. economy, support for our values, and an international order that can address 21st century challenges" (White House, 2010a). This description of what the document is purposed to do is revealing insofar as it is termed the *National Security* Strategy, but addresses a wide range of foreign policy issues. In fact, foreign policy is almost considered to be synonymous with national security given that the NSS can be found on the White House website under the Foreign Policy page. One of the reasons for this is that the NSS presents a comprehensive strategy for dealing with the advancement of the US' interests that starts "by recognising that our strength and influence abroad begins with the steps we take at home" (White House, 2010b: i).

The first thing that is evident when reading the NSS is that while Obama's actions to date may have been pragmatic in their approach, the language of the NSS is still infused with idealism and hope. Per illustration, under the sub-heading of *The Strategic Approach – The World We Seek*, the NSS (White House, 2010b: 10) has the following to say:

> The human rights which America has stood for since our founding have … provided a source of inspiration for peoples around the world … . Our efforts to live our own values, and uphold the principles of democracy in our own society, underpin our support for the aspirations of the oppressed abroad, who know they can turn to America for leadership based on justice and hope.

Those familiar with Obama's rhetoric and foreign policy views, especially those espoused during his campaign, will notice that the NSS does not represent a deviation from these so much as it attempts to consolidate them into a single, comprehensive policy framework. For this reason this thesis will not give an exhaustive account of its content where this merely echoes the guiding principles and accomplishments that have already been discussed. Instead it will give a brief overview of the broad goals of the NSS that are relevant to the inquiry at hand – evaluating Obama's ability to renew US leadership.

Firstly, the NSS is firmly grounded in multilateralism and international cooperation, emphasising that "no one nation – no matter how powerful – can meet global challenges alone" (White House, 2010b: 1). This theme is reiterated on numerous occasions, with the NSS calling on the US to strengthen old alliances, build new ones, and recognise that the US "succeeded in the post-World War II era by pursuing [its] interests within multilateral forums like the United Nations – not outside of them" (White House, 2010b: 12). This further acknowledges common solutions to common problems within an "international system in which all nations have certain rights and responsibilities" (White House, 2010b: 1).

Secondly, the NSS emphasises moral leadership on the part of the US, recognising "the fundamental connection between [its] national security, [its] national competitiveness, resilience, and moral example" (White House, 2010b: 1). This view is based on the assumption that the US has set the moral example in the past and should work toward setting it again. Moreover, this view is based on the belief in a set of universal values on which the US was founded, and which it will work to promote worldwide[18]. These include, "an individual's freedom to speak their mind, assemble without fear, worship as they please, and choose their own leaders; they also include dignity, tolerance, and equality among all people, and the fair and equitable administration of justice" (White House, 2010b: 35). The NSS also promotes the spread of democracy internationally with the caveat expressed earlier that the US will not "impose any system of government on another country" (White House, 2010b: 36). Interestingly, as was suggested earlier, Obama's pragmatic approach to spreading democracy includes engaging with non-democratic regimes and creating more "permissive conditions" in which democratic values can flourish through "more substantive government-to-government relations" (White House, 2010b: 38). In other words, first build bridges and then work on crossing them.

Thirdly, the NSS clearly links domestic actions with foreign outcomes under the notion of "Building at Home, Shaping Abroad" (White House, 2010b: 2). This linkage is based on the view that the magnitude of the US' influence and strength abroad is determined by the actions and decisions that take place at home. The most important domestic aspect in this regard is the US economy, as a healthy economy is required to fund external endeavours. While this is one of the more intuitive linkages, the concept is not limited to physical aspects of US domestic policies. The same notion of building a solid domestic foundation from which to build

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[18] One can be admittedly critical of this assumption and the universality of the values in question. A substantive critique of this issue, however, falls outside the scope of this thesis. Suffice it to say that it is a point of contention in many states who believe that the US has no moral authority to enforce a Western value-system, and that this contention undermines Obama's agency in this regard.

international power and leadership also applies to social and moral issues. A good example of this is the prohibition of torture and enhanced interrogation techniques in order for the US to regain is moral authority on the human rights of detainees and prisoners (White House, 2010b: 36). The NSS firmly argues in favour of the US living the example it would like to see the world embrace. One must note, however, that moral leadership is valued not only for its social impact but also for its role in conventional national security. Torture, for example, is believed to "alienate the United States from the world, … serve as a recruitment and propaganda tool for terrorists, … increase the will of our enemies to fight against us, and endanger our troops when they are captured" (White House, 2010b: 36).

Finally, it is worth discussing how the NSS approached the use of force as this is imperative to both conventional national security and wider foreign policy. Simply stated, the NSS (White House, 2010b: 22) proposes a strategy for dealing with security issues that mitigates the need for force wherever possible; instead it prioritises drawing on other instruments such as "diplomacy, development, and international norms and institutions to help resolve disagreements [and] prevent conflict." Importantly, the NSS reserves the right of the US to use force unilaterally but only as a last resort. Where possible the Obama administration commits to using force with the support of the international arena and through organisations such as NATO and the UN. Nau (2010) criticises this view, however, arguing that Obama does not appreciate the leverage that military force provides at the negotiating table. Nau further believes that Obama is relying on a false dichotomy when weighing up force against diplomacy as the two are mutually reinforcing and not mutually exclusive. The result of this is that Obama's diplomacy is "flaccid" as it lacks the backing of more severe repercussions (Nau, 2010: 40). Obama fails to understand that simply because the US does not use force does not mean that others will not: "The use of force only when it is absolutely necessary does not minimize risks; it leads to much bigger risks later on" (Nau, 2010: 40).

5. Obama's Agency and Renewed US Leadership

Having gained a clearer understanding of what it is that Obama would like to achieve, this thesis can turn to evaluating his potential for success. This will be done using the five-point framework developed in chapter 3, namely (1) a favourable disposition to foreign affairs; (2) strong leadership in policy formulation; (3) command over Pennsylvania Avenue politics; (4) the utilisation of the role of public opinion maker; and (5) the appreciation of the role of global statesman. Subsequent to this Obama's overall level of agency will be discussed in order to reach a prognosis for the future of US leadership under his administration.

5.1. Measuring Obama's Agency

5.1.1. Favourable Disposition to Foreign Affairs

One of most fundamental requirements for presidential agency in foreign policy is the desire by any given president to engage on the foreign policy front. This makes intuitive sense as a president who does not desire to become involved with foreign policy will generally refrain from doing so actively, *ceteris paribus*. Given this assumption it becomes important to establish whether Obama has shown a predilection for becoming involved in the foreign policy sphere.

Fortunately there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that Obama is, in fact, greatly interested in pursuing foreign policy goals. As has been shown in the discussion of his guiding principles and future goals, Obama has repeatedly stated his belief that the US needs to re-establish its position of leadership on the global stage. Moreover, apart from merely showing an interesting in foreign policy, Obama has also expressed a strong desire to repair the damage done to the global perception of the US during the Bush administration. The fact that Obama has moved away from the unilateralism experienced under Bush, towards a multilateral approach to maintaining international peace, also highlights his desire to become an active partner in solving the common problems faced in the world. Obama has repeatedly stated the view that both local and global problems can only be solved in concert with other nations:

> … the security and well-being of each and every American depend on the security and well-being of those who live beyond our borders. The mission of the United States is to provide global leadership grounded in the understanding that the world shares a common security and a common humanity (Obama, 2007b)

The belief that the solutions to the greatest challenges facing the US, especially with regard to safety and security, are grounded in global partnerships and a common humanity is central to Obama's worldview. In fact, Obama (2007b) considers this multilateral philosophy to be a "fundamental insight" of previous US presidents – including Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman,

and John F. Kennedy – whom he believed not only managed to protect the American people, but also to generate opportunities for coming generations. This view is adopted by the NSS through the reciprocal relationship it identifies between foreign and domestic policy success. Obama's NSS views the future of US global leadership as the outcome of their quest to further four "enduring national interests," including *security*; economic *prosperity;* respect for *universal values* at home and abroad; and a co-operative *international order* (White House, 2010b: 17). Importantly, it recognises that in order to achieve global leadership it must pursue these four interests together: "these interests [are] inextricably linked to the others: no single interest can be pursued in isolation, but at the same time, positive action in one area will help advance all four" (White House, 2010b: 17).

The important point to emphasise is that Obama does not show a preference for *either* domestic policy, *or* foreign policy – he is rather interested in US *leadership.* In rejecting the notion that there is a choice between domestic and foreign policy, Obama reveals a worldview where they are not mutually exclusive, but rather mutually reinforcing. Under the worldview, US leadership is considered to be the outcome of a successful combination of a number of policies, both foreign and domestic. Obama thus not only has a favourable disposition towards foreign policy, but views it as imperative to building opportunities for future generations of US citizens.

5.1.2. Strong Leadership in Policy Formulation

The previous section reflects the desire of the president to get involved in foreign policy. On its own, however, this desire is insufficient to generate presidential agency if it is not coupled with a clear agenda and the leadership to transform this into workable policy. The latter does not necessarily require that the president formulates foreign policy exclusively, but rather that he has the strength of leadership to take control over the formulation process. In the previous chapter the notion of policy formulation as a set of concentric circles was introduced. According to this model the president's advisors and political appointees have the greatest influence over policy formulation, with the executive branch, departments and agencies responsible for information gathering and policy implementation. That fact notwithstanding, the president remains at the core of the process and it is his responsibility to take control in order to achieve his agenda. It is thus important to evaluate the president's selection of his advisors, the relationship he has with them, and his ability to guide them toward a unified set of goals.

One of the most important organs in which foreign policy is discussed is the National Security Council NSC. The foundation for NSC was laid by President Harry Truman when he

signed the National Security Act of 1947 (USA, 1947). The Act was responsible for the formation of a National Security Council (NSC) with the following mandate:

> The function of the Council shall be to advise the President with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies relating to the national security so as to enable the military services and the other departments and agencies of the Government to cooperate more effectively in matters involving the national security (USA, 1947).

Over the years the role of the NSC has expanded with each president tailoring it to their requirements. Early on in his term in office, Barack Obama issued Presidential Policy Directive 1 (PPD-1) in which he explicitly set out the organization of the National Security Council System. In PPD-1, Obama (2009b: 2) describes the purpose of the NSC as being to "advise and assist me in integrating all aspects of national security policy as it affects the United States – domestic, foreign, military, intelligence, and economic." While this would suggest a broader understanding of national security than mere *military security* – the traditional view thereof (Romm, 1993) – the actual composition of Obama's NSC[19] still reflects a more traditional understanding. Destler (2009) concurs with this assessment and notes that Obama's configuration is not as "dramatically different" as Obama's first National Security Advisor, General James Jones, claimed it would be. Instead it represents an incremental as opposed to a fundamental expansion. Moreover, Destler (2009) emphasises that "even when the NSC has had a far-reaching mandate in the past, it has not given priority to issues beyond those centred on the United States' political-military and diplomatic relationships." This once again echoes the tension between realism and idealism in Obama's foreign disposition.

More important than the composition of the NSC is Obama's relationship with those who serve on it. In the previous chapter it was argued that the relationship between the president and his top advisors is important to determining the role he will play in shaping foreign policy. A president who is able to actively engage with his inner circle and utilise them to generate innovate and robust policy options will have more agency than one who is unable to do so. For this reason it is important to understand how Obama functions in relation to his three most

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[19] The NSC under Obama will be presided over by the President and will feature four statutory members consisting of the Vice-President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defence and the Secretary of Energy (Obama, 2009b). Other members include, but are not limited to, the National Security Advisor; the Secretary of Homeland Security; the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; the Director of National Intelligence; the Representative of the US to the UN; the Chief of Staff to the President; the Secretary of the Treasury and the Attorney General.

important advisors on the foreign policy front, namely Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton; Secretary of Defence, Robert M. Gates; and National Security Advisor, General James Jones[20].

In theory the Secretary of State is the "president's foremost foreign policy advisor" (Wittkopf, Jones and Kegley, 2008: 368) and it is in filling this position that Obama arguably made his boldest choice with regard to selecting his cabinet, considering their often bitter rivalry during the presidential campaign. In the wake of Hillary Clinton's narrow defeat, however, there was a great deal of speculation and pressure on Obama about whether he would pick her as his running mate in order to secure the support of her many followers, with some referring to it as the "Dream Ticket" (Nagournet and Zeleny, 2008a; Reuters, 2008). One of the areas in which Obama had been greatly criticised during the presidential campaign was his lack of experience in Washington and with global leaders, with the campaign being labelled as one of *Change versus Experience* (Eilperin, 2008; Holland, 2008). Hillary Clinton, on the other hand, could boast greater exposure and more significant credentials in both departments having served as first lady for eight years. In the end Obama selected Joe Biden as his running mate, however, and stated Biden's foreign policy credentials as one of the deciding factors (Komblut, 2008; Nagourney and Zeleny, 2008b; Obama, 2008). None the less, when it came to selecting his cabinet, Obama offered Hillary Clinton the position of Secretary of State, the top foreign policy post. It is thus interesting to study the dynamic between the two when evaluating Obama's role in foreign policy formulation.

Early on in her tenure, Clinton was criticised for playing a relatively small role as Secretary of State, even being branded as "the invisible Secretary of State" by one political commentator (Gardiner, 2009). The media were equally sceptical of the working relationship between Obama and Clinton, with many suggesting that their history as rivals for the Democratic presidential nomination had undermined their ability to work together, claims which the White House were quick to reject (Gardiner, 2009; Kessler, 2009c; Reuters, 2009). Clinton also rejected the claims, blaming the situation partly on breaking her elbow in June of 2009, forcing her to take time off to recover and having to cancel two foreign trips as a result (Pleming, 2009).

Other analysts have taken a different stance, however, arguing that Clinton's initially constrained role can be written off as a transition period in which she was growing into her new position. Given the "avidity" with which Obama "seized the reins of foreign policy – more

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[20] Take note that Jones resigned in October of 2010 and was replaced by his chief deputy, Thomas Donilon. Regardless, Jones was one of Obama' top foreign policy advisors for the first two years of his presidency and thus requires some attention.

assertively than either George W. Bush or Bill Clinton before him," Rothkopf (2009) argues that Clinton's backseat role should be expected. This fact notwithstanding, Rothkopf believes that Clinton has been particularly adept at taking a broader view of US foreign policy and the State Department's role than simply focusing on issues such as Iraq and Afghanistan. These issues already receive a great deal of attention from the presidency and the Department of Defence. Rothkopf (2009) believes that Clinton is taking on a complementary role to Obama and is making progress in addressing many of the problems that plague the State Department by staffing it with aides who possess substantial experience in policy making, economics and budgeting, *inter alia*.[21]

Kessler (2009a) echoes Rothkopf's assessment of Clinton, referring to her as a "team player who stands apart," who by all accounts is "often the best-briefed, most prepared person in the room" and consequently respected and appreciated by Obama. Similarly, Barnett (Barnett, 2009) describes Clinton as "famously wonkish" and argues that her tenure as Secretary has taken the same path as her career in the Senate, with her "(1) mastering detail, (2) getting her own 'house' in order, and (3) purposely staying above the day-to-day fray of crisis response."

Clinton has also been praised for building solid relationships with Obama's other top advisors, Defence Secretary Robert M. Gates and National Security Advisor, James Jones (Kessler, 2009a). Gates, who considers himself a Republican despite never having registered as such, is a holdover from the Bush administration after replacing Donald Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defence when Rumsfeld tendered his resignation in November of 2006. Regardless of their opposing party affiliations, the good relationship between Clinton and Gates has been noted by numerous parties, including both Clinton and Gates who praised their working relationship with each other. During a town hall meeting hosted at George Washington University (Dept. of State, 2009; Landler and Shanker, 2009). This bodes well for Obama as by Gate's own admission, secretaries of State and Defence often have less than cooperative relationships (Dept. of State, 2009).

Obama's decision to keep Gates was welcomed by both Democrats and Republicans who believed that it would provide continuity with regard to policy on Iraq and Afghanistan (Baker

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[21] Clinton recruited Jack Lew (a budget chief who served under President Clinton) to reform the State Department's finances and former Goldman Sachs International vice chairman Robert Hormats to handle economic issues (Rothkopf, 2009). She also brought in Alec Ross, formerly a member of Obama's technology team, to serve as her senior advisor for innovation. Ross has essentially been tasked with finding new ways to harness information technology tools to advance US interests (Rothkopf, 2009). Finally, Clinton appointed Anne-Marie Slaughter, a former dean of Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School, as director of policy planning (Kessler, 2009a).

and Shanker, 2008; DeYoung and Shear, 2008). Unlike the decision to appoint Clinton as Secretary of State, the decision to retain Gates was not marred by personal baggage. The decision, which can be regarded as a pragmatically wise one on Obama's part, was not entirely free from issues however. From the perspective of policy on Iraq and Afghanistan, Obama and Gates differed somewhat in their approach. Gates, who is also considered to be pragmatist, publically questioned Obama's timeline for withdrawing troops from Iraq stating that his proposed timeline would undermine the situation on the ground (Bumiller, 2008; DeYoung and Shear, 2008). After the announcement of his national security team both parties shifted their stance, however. Obama (quoted in Shanker, 2008) reneged somewhat on the 16 month timeline taken during his campaign with the following statement during the announcement of his national security team:

> I said that I would remove our combat troops from Iraq in 16 months, with the understanding that it might
> be necessary – likely to be necessary – to maintain a residual force … in Iraq. … I believe that 16 months is
> the right time frame, but, as I've said consistently, I will listen to the recommendations of my commanders.

Gates, on the other hand, accepted the mandate given to him by the president-elect to plan a phased withdrawal. Instead of discussing whether this was a good idea, Gates (quoted in Shanker, 2008) noted that the question had become, "[h]ow do we do this in a responsible way? … [N]obody wants to put at risk the gains that have been achieved, with so much sacrifice, on the part of our soldiers and the Iraqis, at this point".

The final member of Obama's foreign policy inner circle is the National Security Advisor. The position was held by General James Jones from Obama's inauguration until Jones' resignation in October of 2010. Jones was replaced by his chief deputy, Thomas Donilon. Considering these developments this thesis will refrain for an exhaustive evaluation of Jones. It is worth noting, however, than Jones' tenure was marked by a number of squabbles and turf wars with Obama's other advisors, notably Rahm Emanuel, David Axelrod and Robert Gibbs[22], the majority of which had longstanding relationships with Obama prior to their appointment (Feller, 2010). Jones, in contrast, had only spoken to Obama twice prior to October of 2008, after meeting for the first time in 2005 (Crowley, 2008). Ironically, Crowley (2008) predicted that Jones would be a good choice given that Jones "has the diplomatic skills to navigate the Obama administration's egos and relationships. Plus, he does not appear to be a natural antagonist of anyone else on the team."

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[22] Rahm Emanuel served as Obama's chief of staff until October of 2010. David Axelrod was the chief strategist for Obama's presidential campaign and was appointed as a senior advisor to the president after his election. Robert Gibbs serves as the White House press secretary.

Donilon, Jones' replacement, will arguably be better placed to advise the president as the two have a close working relationship. Moreover, Sanger and Cooper (2010), argue that as chief deputy to Jones, Donilon was responsible for performing most of the day to day tasks associated with the position: "General Jones spent a lot of time wrangling with allies and adversaries alike on Mr. Obama's behalf on the international stage, but wielded less influence within the White House, where Mr. Donilon … spoke more regularly with Mr. Obama and served as the go-to aides for staff members trying to gauge where the president stood." Donilon also appears to share many of Obama's views on issues such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as with regard to Pakistan (Sanger and Cooper, 2010).

In the final assessment, one can conclude that Obama's desire to be an active foreign policy president has resulted in him taking a collegial approach to the selection of his advisors and gathered together a group of highly skilled and experienced individuals (Jones, 2010). Importantly, his advisors have both the ability and willingness to challenge the president where necessary, but simultaneously the political savvy to realise that the President remains the commander-in-chief. In Obama's words:

> I did not ask for assurances from these individuals that they would agree with me at all times. I think they understood and would not be joining this team unless they understood and were prepared to carry out the decisions that have been made by me after full discussion. … On the broad core vision of where America needs to go we are in almost complete agreement. There are going to be differences in tactics and different assessments and judgments made. That's what I expect; that's what I welcome. That's why I asked them to join the team.

5.1.3. Command Over Pennsylvania Avenue Politics

Just as the formulation of foreign policy is a necessary outflow of the desire for engagement with foreign affairs, so is the ability to get it passed a necessary outflow of its formulation. In the second chapter the various constraints that the president faces in implementing his personal foreign policy goals were discussed, especially with regard to the interaction between the president, the House and the Senate. One of the ways in which these can be minimised is if the president is able to bridge the partisan divide in Washington and cultivate a good political relationship with the members of Congress. This will enable the president to have the legislation that he proposes passed, and the treaties that he signs to be ratified. Considering that Congress also holds the purse strings, it will enable the president to get the required funding to fulfil his agenda.

During his campaign Obama was consistently vocal about his ability and desire to bridge the partisan divide in Washington and reach across the aisle in order to solve the problems facing

the US. In fact, Obama has always been open about his admiration for Abraham Lincoln for this very reason, and announced his candidacy in front of the Old State Capital in Springfield, Illinois[23]. In his speech, Obama (2007a) was honest about his lack of experience in Washington, but simultaneously used this fact to his advantage by arguing that he was not yet corrupted by it. He also worked hard to sell his bipartisan credentials, most often citing his work with Republican Senator Dick Lugar on a bill aimed at international nuclear safety.

On this surface this seems to indicate that Obama's pragmatic personality lends itself toward bipartisan co-operation. One must note at this point, however, that Obama came to the White House with a *unified* government. This was shown in chapter 2 to denote a situation where the president's party controls both chambers of Congress. In fact, when Obama came to office in January of 2009, the Democrats held 59 out of 100 seats in the Senate (including 2 independent seats who caucus with the Democrats) (US Senate, 2010a), and 257 out of 435 seats in the House of Representatives (US House of Representatives, 2010). This placed Obama in a particularly favourable position with regard to getting legislation passed, as he did not have the constraint of having to fight partisan battles in a divided government. Obama should thus have no problem in getting legislation passed as long as the Democratic controlled House and Senate vote along party lines. This places Obama's calls for bipartisanship in a somewhat different light as it is easy for Obama to praise the ideal of bipartisanship when he is arguably not reliant on it to succeed. Having said that, Obama's calls for a bipartisan government admittedly date back to the very beginnings of his campaign[24]; the question is whether the rhetoric has been transferred into action given the context of a unified government.

Since his election, Obama's promise to change Washington and abandon petty partisanship has been widely scrutinised by political analysts, many of whom claim that he has been unable to do so. An interesting and illustrative case in this regard is the issue of health care reform. In his speech to the California State Democratic Convention in May of 2007, Obama (2007b – empahsis added) had the following to say:

> … if we do not fundamentally change the way Washington works - then the problems we've been talking about for the last generation will be the same ones that haunt us for generations to come.

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[23] The building is famous for it is here that Lincoln delivered his well-known "House Divided": speech in June of 1858. In this speech, Lincoln (1953) pointed out the dangers of a government divided over the issue of slavery, and called for unity against it. In making his speech in front of the Old State Capital, Obama was attempting to invoke the same sense of unity that Lincoln had called for.

[24] See, for example, Obama's (2007a) official announcement of his candidacy.

… It's time to turn the page on health care - to bring together unions and businesses, *Democrats and Republicans*, and to let the insurance and drug companies know that while they get a seat at the table, they don't get to buy every chair.

When I am president, I will sign a universal health care law by the end of my first term.

While Obama succeeded in passing the landmark Health Care Reform legislation he promised, it was far from a bipartisan victory. The issue instead polarised Washington and when the Health Care Reform legislation (H.R. 4872)[25] finally came up against a vote in the two chambers of Congress during March of 2009, no Republicans supported the respective bills in either chamber (US House of Representatives, 2010; US Senate, 2010b). More surprisingly, while both of the independent senators supported the bill, 3 Democratic senators rejected it – it passed with 56 votes to 43, with one senator abstaining. In the House, the bill passed with 220 votes to 211. Of the 220 yeas, all were from Democratic congressmen, while 33 of the nays were Democratic.

The lesson that one must glean from this is that while Obama was able to get the votes he needed, it was not the bipartisan *tour de force* he had promised. Had it not been for the fact that the Democrats controlled both chambers of the Congress, the bill would certainly not have passed. While this is perhaps a forgone conclusion, the point is that Obama hoped to unite the Democrats and the Republicans on the issue. In this endeavour he failed dismally, and this leads one to believe that where true ideological differences exist, even Obama will not be able to accomplish any more than any one of his predecessors. Lawrence Lessig[26] (2010a) concurs on this point, stating that "by ignoring what he promised, and by doing what he attacked [during his campaign] …, Obama will leave the presidency, whether in 2013 or 2017, with Washington essentially intact and the movement he inspired betrayed."

With the 2010 midterm elections scheduled to take place on 2 November 2010, Obama could very well be forced to put his bipartisan credentials to the test as a deterioration[27] seems likely. With less than a month to go before the elections, the majority of pollsters[28] predict that

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[25] The *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* in the Senate, vote number 105 of 2010. The *Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010* in the House of Representatives, roll call vote number 167 of 2010.

[26] Lawrence Lessig is a politically liberal American academic and political activist and serves as a director of the Edmond J. Safra Foundation Centre for Ethics at Harvard University as well as a professor of law at Harvard Law School (Lessig, 2010b).

[27] See section 2.4.

[28] See Gallup, 2010; Rasmussen, 2010a; Rasmussen, 2010b; Rasmussen, 2010c; RealClearPolitics, 2010a; RealClearPolitics, 2010b; RealClearPolitics, 2010c; RealClearPolitics, 2010d; and Washington Post, 2010.

the Democrats will probably lose control of both the chambers of Congress, as well as their majority in the gubernatorial corps. This will place Obama in a very different position than the one he faced during the first half of his term, and could result in lame-duck presidency if he is unable to bridge the partisan divide. In section 3.1.3 it was shown that there are four possible patterns of presidential-congressional relations: *cooperation, constructive compromise, institutional competition* and *confrontation*. Obama's rhetoric to date would have us believe that he would be able to achieve a cooperative environment, but given his track record with the Republicans on health care reform, one can assume that confrontation – or at best institutional competition – is a more likely outcome. This will seriously compromise his ability to achieve any policy agenda, let alone a radically different approach to foreign policy.

A divided government and confrontational relationship is, of course, a worst case scenario. It is worth noting that the last Democratic president, Bill Clinton, witnessed major losses in the number of seats held by his party and a reversal of the Democratic majority in both chambers of Congress (Ceaser and DiSalvo, 2006). Ironically, Caesar and DiSalvo (2006: 8) argue that this was largely a result of his "his ill-fated healthcare plan," yet further argue that he went on to deal with the reversal well. In retrospect, Clinton is generally regarded as being a successful president despite his personal missteps.[29] If nothing else this is indicative of an open-ended future for Obama's relationship with Congress.

5.1.4. Utilisation of Role as Public Opinion Maker

In chapter 3 it was discussed how presidents can make use of public opinion to garner support for their agenda. In the wake of 9/11, Bush was particularly adept at riling up support for his War on Terror through the use of the presidential platform. In his famous "I can hear you" moment[30], Bush captured the need of the American people for retaliation to the attacks, and subsequently rode a tide of emotion to gain widespread support for his pro-war agenda and a second term in office. Toward the end of Bush's presidency, however, the tide had turned against him and the American people no longer blindly supported the war, or the government's

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[29] In fact, Clinton has the distinction of the being the president with the highest approval rating on exiting the White House of all the post-WWII presidents (Saad, 2009). Similarly, while a Wall Street Journal / NBC poll conducted in September of 2010 found Bill Clinton to have the highest positive rating (55%) of all the political figures included in the poll, even higher than President Obama (47%) (Seib, 2010). Finally, a Gallup poll conducted in February of 2007, Clinton ranked as the 4th greatest US president behind Lincoln, Reagan and Kennedy (Saad, 2007).

[30] In the days of the 9/11 attacks, President Bush visited the New York City to take a tour of ground zero. When Bush started speaking, people in the crowd gathered around him shouted that they could not hear him. Bush responded by saying that "I can hear you. The rest of the world hears you. And the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon" (CNN, 2001).

justification thereof. In contrast to Bush, Obama thus rode a wave of *anti-war* sentiment to the White House.

The purpose of this section is to show how Obama has successfully utilised a number of traditional and modern methods in order to shape public opinion in his favour. This is particularly important for this thesis as one of its central contentions is that the understanding and utilisation of modern electronic communication technology and social networks – broadly referred to as ICT – is what set Obama apart from his competitors during his presidential campaign, and his predecessors once in office. Obama's love affair with technology is one that has received widespread attention from the media and other sources (Hendricks and Denton, 2010). It would be fair to say that no presidential candidate has been as adept as Obama was in utilising ICT to his advantage. In fact, it was this use of ICT that enabled Obama to engage with a younger generation of voters and ultimately win the nomination for the Democratic ticket.

It was explained in the first chapter that ICT refers to information and communication technology. This is a rather broad and all-encompassing term that refers to everything from basic telephony to high-speed, broadband internet[31]. While all presidential candidates in the past have made use of electronic communication technology to some degree or another, the 2008 elections were different insofar as candidates were able to capitalise on the recent developments in ICT that were not available to candidates even as recently as the 2004 election cycle (Hendricks and Denton, 2010). It is these recent developments that we will be focusing on.

The main development in this regard is the expansion of broadband internet. This has given billions of people around the world instant, interactive access to real-time news. While real-time global news access has been available in the form of television and radio technology for some time now, the difference is that broadband offers the end user the ability to become actively involved in *shaping* the news (Shirky, 2008). The emergence of Web 2.0[32] has generated a new breed of internet users who become actively involved in the creation, sharing and consumption of internet based content through social networking, blogging and video sharing services. Some of the more popular or well-known sites and services associated with Web 2.0 include MySpace,

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[31] In simple terms, broadband refers to an increase in bandwidth, or the rate at which data can be transported. The increase in bandwidth allows for larger amounts of information to be transported more quickly than in the past. The result is that larger files – such as photos and videos – become instantly accessible over the internet.

[32] Web 2.0 refers to a number of interactive web-based services that represent a shift in the way content on the internet is generated, away from central providers such as news agencies, towards the end-users themselves (Shirky, 2008). This has been facilitated by the expansion of broadband as it allows uses to share larger files and multimedia content, generally of their own creation.

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and the multitude of blogging platforms available on the internet. The rise of Web 2.0 has come about at the same time as the developments in wireless internet, consumer electronics and device convergence[33] that gives the end-user constant access to these services through portable devices such as cell phones, netbooks and laptops. This increasing access to consumer electronics and communication and information networks has changed the way people interact with one another as proximity has become a non-issue. In 2008, Bill Gates (2008) envisioned a world where every device is connected to the internet in what he called the "second digital decade." The result of this trend is a world in everyone is constantly connected to everyone else (in theory in any case), and in which information flows freely between users on different continents. Gates (2008) noted in 2008 that mobile phone penetration stood at 41% of the world population with it increasing steadily.

This has a number of repercussions for the political sphere. The level of penetration of these technologies into the public sphere, and the number of users that have come to rely on them, holds enormous potential power for influencing public opinion, *inter alia*. A good case study of how the internet can be used as a political tool is Obama's 2008 presidential campaign (Hendricks and Denton, 2010). Obama and his chief campaign strategist, David Axelrod, were acutely aware of the power of the internet, also termed new-media, in the run-up to the election and used it both as a tool to generate support for Obama, as well to spread rhetoric and criticism against his opponents. In order to fully capitalise on the phenomenon, Obama appointed Chris Hughes, one of Facebook's cofounders, to run his internet campaign early in 2007 (Stetler, 2008). Hughes was able to harness one of the great advantages of Web 2.0 over traditional media, notably that it is largely self-sustaining. The very principle of Web 2.0 is that users function independently from central control. The result of this is that once a basic message had been promulgated by Obama's campaign, it spread virally through the internet of its own accord as end users generated and shared their own content in support of Obama. Apart from merely helping spread the message, the use of new-media also helped to organise Obama's followers via the campaign's website, my.barackobama.com; dispel rumours about him through a website devoted to fact checking, fightthesmears.com; and enable his supports to donate to the campaign via the website.

Numerous tangible examples of this can also be cited. One endeavour saw Obama's campaign encourage the millions of his supports registered on the campaign's email list to "Unite

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[33] The phenomenon of single devices that perform a multitude of previously independent functions, such as smartphones that can make phone calls, access the internet, take photos and play music.

for Change" by hosting house parties to win over undecided voters and Clinton supporters (after she bowed out of the race); over 4,000 parties were eventually held (Organising for America, 2008). Another project provided registered users of the campaign's website to access with a list of phone numbers from the campaign's database, which Obama supporters could then call from home to campaign on his behalf. Hundreds of thousands of calls were placed as a result, the majority from ordinary supporters (Stetler, 2008). Finally, the donation campaign was particularly successful. According to official data from the Federal Election Commission (2010), Obama received a total of $659,068,258 from individual donors. More significantly, 37% of this total ($246,110,054) came from donations of under $200 per individual, with more than half (51.5%) coming from individual donations of less than $500. To put this into perspective, Obama's opponent, John McCain, raised only $199,446,450 from individual donations, or 30% of Obama's total. This makes Obama's (quoted in Stetler, 2008) remarks on the use of the internet as a campaign tool unsurprising:

> One of my fundamental beliefs from my days as a community organizer is that real change comes from the bottom up, … and there's no more powerful tool for grass-roots organizing than the Internet.

Apart from the impact on his election, however, Obama's utilisation of ICT shaped the global perception of his campaign and presidency. The fact that Obama's message was equally available on other continents as it was in the US meant that Obama's anti-war and multilateral rhetoric spread around the world. In the context of increasing global criticism of foreign policy under bush, and the belief that McCain represented a continuation thereof, it can be argued that never before has the international society been so heavily invested in a US election, or followed it so avidly. It is for this reason that when Obama arrived in Berlin even prior to his election, he was greeted as a hero. The question is whether this popularity abroad really translates into increased presidential agency in foreign policy?

Public opinion can arguably be utilised to generate presidential agency on two fronts. On the one hand, Obama can utilise his role as a public opinion maker domestically to inform the US public of his chosen direction for foreign policy and generate support for various foreign policy goals. Obama's success in organising his supports on the domestic front has already been shown and will not receive more attention. Instead it will turn to how social networking sites can be used *abroad,* to spread Obama's message of remaking the US and win the hearts and minds of the US' detractors abroad.

The significance of using social networking as a tool for political propaganda and activism across international lines can be found in marches organised against the Colombian narco-

terrorist group, the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC), for kidnapping and holding hostages. On 4 February 2008, millions of Colombians protested simultaneously against FARC in 27 cities throughout Cambodia, and another 104 major cities around the world (Pérez, 2008). The protest was orchestrated by Oscar Morales via a group he started on Facebook, and ultimately led to an estimated 4.8 million people participating in 365 marches in Cambodia. Other marches took place in Europe, Asia and the US. A similar incident occurred in October of 2007, when thousands took part in a march around the world – also organised via Facebook after a student started a group – to to condemn Myanmar's repression of pro-democracy protests (Pérez, 2008).

The anecdotal evidence from the campaign, combined with similar success stories of using social networking as a political tool internationally, suggests that Obama could be highly successful in shaping public opinion abroad. If Obama is able to emulate the model he used domestically to organise and win supporters on a wider, international scale, he could very well change global perceptions of the US. There is already evidence to suggest that he has been successful in doing so. The US-Global Leadership Project, a partnership between the Meridian International Centre and Gallup, measured the change in perceptions of US leadership from the Bush to the Obama administration. The findings of the polling data, released in February 2010, indicated that approval ratings of the leadership of the US – which had remained steadily around 30% for 2006, 2007 and 2008 – increased to 51% in 2009 (English, 2010). While an increase in approval was found in the majority of the 102 countries polled, the most significant median increase was found in European countries. This bodes well for Obama who has repeatedly highlighted the need to restore the perception of the US among its post-WWII allies in Europe.

5.1.5. Utilisation of Role as a Global Statesman

The US president's role as a global statesman is not one that all presidents are fully appreciative of. Yet the power held by the office of the President of the United States is one that is largely unsurpassed in the international arena. Presidents who are able to utilise this role are thus given an unparalleled ability to form global events. Obama can be considered to form part of the group of presidents who do appreciate its significance, and this will no doubt give him prominent international standing.

A good example of this is the relationship with the US and EU over the issue of terrorism. Despite the fact that on paper the US and EU shared a very similar approach to international

security in the wake of 9/11,[34] the relationship between the two has always be amiable. A great deal of damage was done by the Bush administration as a result of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, examples of which include criticism of the US by the EU for its tendency toward "the language of war and in particular the use of the neologism 'war on terror,'" as well as disputes over what "constitutes a legitimate political or charitable activity and what constitutes support for a terrorist group" (Shapiro and Byman, 2006: 2). In theory, however, the EU is strongly supportive of their alliance with the US. The European Security Strategy (ESS) (European Council, 2003: 3) recognises an increase in a number of new, more insidious threats (such as terrorism) that are altogether "more diverse, less visible and less predictable," and leaves no doubt about importance of their relationship with the US in order to address these new threats:

> The transatlantic relationship is irreplaceable. Acting together, the European Union and the United States can be a formidable force for good in the world. Our aim should be an effective and balanced partnership with the USA. (European Council, 2003: 13)

Obama is also particularly supportive of the relationship between the US and Europe, and the need to strengthen this in order to secure the world. As early as during his campaign, Obama (2007b) noted that the US had failed its allies by sending them the message that the US did not need them, arguing that "[i]n the case of Europe, we dismissed European reservations about the wisdom and necessity of the Iraq war." Since coming to office he has made the reestablishment of these alliances a priority, stating this clearly in the foreword to his National Security Strategy (White House, 2010b):

> In the past, we have had the foresight to act judiciously and to avoid acting alone. We were part of the most powerful wartime coalition in human history through World War II, and stitched together a community of free nations and institutions to endure a Cold War. … [W]e will be steadfast in strengthening those old alliances that have served us so well, while modernizing them to meet the challenges of a new century.

Fully aware of this need to strengthen alliances abroad, Obama made a number of state visits during his first year in office. In fact, Obama set the record for the most foreign visits of any US president in his first year of office, with a total of 7 foreign trips (including 16 individual states) made by November of 2009 (Dept. of State, 2010; Knoller, 2009). This also excludes the trips he made during his campaign, including the trip to Europe in July of 2008.

Interestingly, one of the biggest differences between Obama's foreign policy and that of Bush, is the willingness to meet with the US' enemies. In numerous interviews and debates,

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[34] See the National Security Strategy of the US of 2002 (White House, 2002), and the European Security Strategy (ESS) of 2003 (European Council, 2003).

Obama confirmed that he would be willing to meet with the leaders of Iran, Syria, Venezuela, Cuba and North Korea without precondition but with preparation (OFA, 2008). Obama once famously argued that "the notion that somehow not talking to countries is punishment to them – which has been the guiding diplomatic principle of [the Bush] administration – is ridiculous" (CNN, 2007). In response to the on-going debate over the issue during the presidential campaign, Bush (2008) eventually attacked Obama stating that by meeting with the US' enemies you "lend [them] the status of the office [of the presidency] and the status of our country to [them]." The argument on this issue centred largely around Obama's repeatedly expressed willingness to meet with Iranian leader, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to discuss Iran's nuclear problem. Obama reiterated this stance as recently as September of 2010 in an address to the UN General Assembly:

> I offered the Islamic Republic of Iran an extended hand last year, and underscored that it has both rights and responsibilities as a member of the international community. … Now let me be clear once more: The United States and the international community seek a resolution to our differences with Iran, and the door remains open to diplomacy should Iran choose to walk through it (Obama, 2010).

The problem for Obama's agency is that this is largely irrelevant considering that Ahmadinejad has been unwilling to accept the invitation. Instead Ahmadinejad has rejected it outright and dismissed Obama as being no different than his predecessors. Iranian Parliament Speaker, Ali Larijani, went even further and called Obama an "international villain":

> How dare Obama announce that he wants to help the Iranian nation? He should know that he is an international villain, he has never sided with Iranian nation. … Today, the US is standing against Iranian nation, Obama should know that we do not want his messages, what we need is to be able to trust his words (ISNA, 2010).

Other failures abound. Despite Obama's speech on climate change at the 2009 UN Climate Change Conference (COP15), analysts noted that no new major consensus was reached in Copenhagen and that the US offered no new leadership on the issue (Black, 2009; Bull, 2009). Similarly, despite Clinton's ability to renew negotiations in the Middle-East the situation remains largely unchanged. The same holds for the situation in Iraq, where Obama's 16 month withdrawal timeline was not realised (DeYoung, 2009).

Regardless of these shortcomings, it is the desire to engage with the old allies of the US, and the willingness to engage with the US' enemies, that lead to Obama being awarded the

Nobel Peace Prize in October of 2009[35], despite him not even having served a full year in office. In justifying their decision to award Obama the prize, the Norwegian Nobel Committee (2009) commended Obama's to strength international diplomacy and cooperation:

> Obama has as President created a new climate in international politics. Multilateral diplomacy has regained a central position, with emphasis on the role that the United Nations and other international institutions can play. … Only very rarely has a person to the same extent as Obama captured the world's attention and given its people hope for a better future. His diplomacy is founded in the concept that those who are to lead the world must do so on the basis of values and attitudes that are shared by the majority of the world's population.

This suggests that although Obama has not been successful at changing perceptions of the governments of some of the US' enemies – notably Iran – he has been successful in rebuilding relationships with the US' allies. This is also reflected in the uptick in approval of US leadership discussed in the previous section. This increase will undoubtedly aide Obama in solving problems that required a multilateral approach and generally increase his level of agency in foreign affairs.

5.2. The Prognosis for Obama's Renewal of US Leadership

The first half of this thesis set out to show that the utilisation of informal powers allow presidents to overcome many of the constraints and limitations imposed on their foreign policy agency by the Constitution, as well as the environment in which they must function. After a methodical analysis and consideration of this hypothesis, this thesis can conclude that this is indeed the case. All other things being equal, a president who is able to successfully utilise the various informal powers available to him – specifically those identified in the five-point framework – will undoubtedly have a greater degree of agency in foreign policy than one who is unable to do so.

The second half of this thesis set out to measure President's Obama's utilisation of these informal powers, and the impact this will have on his level of presidential agency in foreign policy. More specifically, it set out to determine how the use of informal powers will impact on his ambitious agenda to restore US (moral) leadership on the global stage. The result of this study is somewhat more ambiguous. It is clear that while Obama certainly possesses a number of traits that will aide him in achieving his agenda, this is simply not enough given the larger foreign policy context in which he came to office.

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[35] The award ceremony was held in December.

Recalling the discussion of how Obama measures up against the framework above, one is inclined to conclude that Obama should be a successful foreign policy president. Obama displays a great penchant for engaging with foreign affairs and he has presented an ambitious list of goals that he would like his administration to achieve. Obama has also managed to put together a formidable team of foreign policy advisors who are able to assist him in implementing this agenda. Furthermore, the fact that Obama came to the White House with a unified government placed him in a good position to get the congressional support required to approve and fund his foreign policy initiatives. Finally, Obama has also been highly adept at utilising both conventional and new-media sources in order to shape public opinion and alter perceptions of the US abroad, while he has easily stepped into the role of global statesman and has been well received by the majority of the international community.

The problem is that despite Obama's theoretical degree of agency as predicted by the five-point framework, Brzezinski's (2009: 53) "widespread crisis of confidence in America's capacity to exercise effective leadership in world affairs" requires more than a mere rebranding of the US to overcome. While Obama has been successful in restoring goodwill among the US' traditional allies, he has not succeeded among its greatest enemies, notably Iran. The reason for this is that their distrust of the US is more deep-seated than a simple disagreement over unilateralism versus multilateralism. Instead it stems from a disagreement over the liberal, democratic value system on which the US is based the US' attempts to impose it in the middle-east (Gause, 2005). Ironically, this is precisely the value system that Obama is aiming to export to the world through re-establishing US leadership. While this does not preclude a renewal of US leadership abroad, especially among those nations who do support such a drive, he is still plagued by the constraint of time management and the electoral process, discussed in section 2.5. Given the magnitude of the problem Obama faces with regard to a decline in the leadership of the US, it will require more than Obama's remaining two years in office to solve.[36] This ultimately begs the question of whether Obama will be able to win a second term in office to enable him to accomplish his agenda. There are three possible scenarios in this regard, each of which will impact on Obama's agenda in different ways.

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[36] It should be noted at this point that this thesis has relied on the assumption that leadership matters in foreign policy. This is in contrast to a realist view that sees states – and not their leadership – as the primary actors. Considering that Obama has not been as successful as he hoped to be. This may suggest that this assumption is flawed. This thesis rejects this suggestion, however, given that Obama's task has been to shape both the perceptions of US foreign policy as well as the policy itself. In the former case the leadership is important as they are directly responsible for shaping public opinion and expanding soft power.

The first scenario sees the Democrats losing the 2012 presidential election to the Republicans, with or without Obama as the Democratic candidate. In this scenario it is doubtful whether Obama's attempts to renew the US' leadership will have any lasting effect as a partisan change in control of the White House will undoubtedly bring a deviation from Obama's foreign policy agenda.

The second scenario sees Obama losing the Democratic presidential nomination but with the Democrats retaining the White House. Depending on who his successor is, will determine whether the gains he has made with regard to goodwill towards the US can be expanded upon. If, for arguments sake, Hillary Clinton were to win the 2012 presidential election – a highly unlikely scenario but a possibility none the less – she may continue with some of Obama's policies aimed at re-establishing US leadership.

The third scenario sees Obama winning a second term in office, with the possibility of the Democrats retaining the White House at the end of his second term. This will allow him to build on the successes of his first term without the constraint of having to think about re-election. The biggest constraint for a possible second term for Obama will be whether he is forced to serve with a unified or (partly) divided government. If the Democrats lose control of the House or Senate in the 2010 midterms and fail to regain this control in 2012 or 2014, Obama will be forced to put his bipartisan credentials to the test in order to accomplish his goals.

That leaves the question of which scenario is the most likely? Obama's domestic approval ratings reflect an American public that has become disillusioned with the candidate they swept to victory on a wave of hope and idealism. Just three days before Obama received the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, his job approval ratings in the US had fallen to 47%. What is striking about this figure is that it placed Obama as the president with the lowest approval rating of any president at that point in their presidency (Jones, 2009). Similarly, when looking at the year as a whole Obama polled an average approval rating of 57% his first year in office. This places him in joint second from last (with Ronald Regan) of all the post-WWII presidents, beaten only by Bill Clinton who polled an average of 49% for his first year (Jones, 2010). While a number of reasons could be identified that explain these figures – such as the sluggish recovery of the US economy or the debate over health care reform – Michael Gerson (2010) argues that "[t]he most destructive gap for President Obama … is the gap between aspiration and reality." Obama energised the electorate with the idea that he would be able to reform Washington and the US. Two years into his presidency it appears as if little has indeed changed. It remains to be seen

whether Obama will be able to retain the coalition that handed him the White House in 2008 for another victory in 2012.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Summary of Findings

The purpose of this thesis has been to use a two-level analysis to show that the utilisation of informal powers can partially allow presidents to overcome constitutional constraints to their level of foreign policy agency. Subsequently, that Obama's utilisation of informal powers may enable him to achieve his ambitious agenda to renew US leadership on the global stage.

There is no doubt that Obama came to the White House with an ambitious project in mind. Anti-US sentiment had been rising steadily under the Bush administration and during the campaign, Obama positioned himself as the president that aimed to remake the US' image abroad. Moreover, Obama promised to do so by restoring the moral leadership of the US and fundamentally changing the approach of the US to the problem of global security. Two years into his first term his supporters have been left somewhat disappointed that he has not been more successful. Many of the goals Obama stated during his presidential campaign have not been realised. One is hesitant, however, to simply dismiss Obama's speeches and actions prior to his taking office as mere politicking. This thesis has set out to utilise a methodical approach to presidential agency in foreign policy in order to explain the reason for Obama's success, or lack thereof.

In the first half of this thesis the role of the president in formulating foreign policy was analysed. A number of constraints were identified that have the potential to prevent presidents from achieving their foreign policy agenda. It was shown in chapter 3, however, that in some cases these constraints can be mitigated through the utilisation of certain informal powers held by the president. In most cases, however, these constraints are too large for presidents to overcome as they lack the time and resources required to do so.

Abstracting from both academic as well as anecdotal evidence, a set of five criteria was established to measure potential presidential agency in foreign policy. This framework included: (1) a favourable disposition to foreign affairs; (2) the ability to provide strong leadership in policy formulation; (3) a command over Pennsylvania Avenue politics; (4) the utilisation of the role of public opinion maker; (5) and the utilisation of the role of global statesmen.

Barack Obama was shown to do well against the five-point framework with the main areas in which he excels including the utilisation of public opinion as a political tool, as well as the utilisation of the role of global statesman. In both cases Obama has shown an appreciation for

the politics of perception and has skilfully made use of the tools at his disposal to bring about change.

Given his favourable level of potential agency the reason for Obama's lack of accomplishments was found to stem from the magnitude of the challenges he faces with regard to his agenda. This is a result of the larger foreign policy context in which he came to office given the deep-seated distrust of the motives underlying US foreign policy in certain regions. Furthermore, the time constraints he faces, and the impact of the election cycle, have served to limit the pace of implementation and the extent of the changes he seeks to make. Taking this into consideration the prognosis for the renewal of US leadership was found to depend on whether Obama is able to win a second term in office. If he is able to do so, it is believed that his utilisation of informal powers will give him the ability to make some progress with regard to renewing US leadership. The only caveat to this scenario is that he will possibly have to contend with a divided government (pundits are predicting that the Democrats will not fare well in the 2010 mid-terms, as discussed in section 5.1.3), but this is not an insurmountable obstacle.

6.2. Contribution of Study

The contribution of this study to the academic discourse can be divided into four main areas. The most significant contribution has been to show that informal powers can significantly mitigate the limitations placed on presidential agency by constitutional and and structural constraints contained in the US political system. Presidents who possess the personality and political savvy to make use of the various informal powers at their disposal are undoubtedly better placed to achieve foreign policy goals.

The second noteworthy contribution of this thesis has been the development of a five-point framework against which past, present and future presidents can be measured in order to determine their potential for agency in foreign policy. While a number of studies have identified various criteria that impact on presidential agency in foreign policy, including the utilisation of informal powers, they lack a comprehensive and generalizable framework such as this one.

This thesis has also shown that the utilisation of ICT as a political instrument for shaping public opinion can have a significant impact within the foreign policy sphere by providing governments with a propaganda dissemination tool that is both interactive and self-sustaining. Obama is indeed a new breed of politician in this regard, and has capitalised on the technological advances and development of social networking of the past few years. This is believed to be Obama's greatest distinguishing characteristic and the one that will provide him with the greatest level of agency relative to the other informal powers.

Finally, this thesis has added to the literature on Obama's presidency and subjected at least one of his campaign promises to methodical, academic analysis as opposed to main-stream speculation and discussion.

6.3. Areas for Future Research

After completing this thesis, five main areas for future research can be identified. Firstly, it is clear that Obama has not been as successful as he would have hoped in his past two years in office. Given the infamous nature of campaign promises it would be interesting to study whether Obama's relative failures reflect a departure from his stated goals given the tension between idealism and realism contained in his foreign policy disposition, or simply an inability to achieve them?

Secondly, given the scope of this thesis it was impossible to evaluate past presidents using the five-point framework. In order to test the framework's reliability and generalizability, however, it is vital that future studies apply it to past presidents in order to determine if it is a good predictor of their foreign policy agency. If the framework can explain why past presidents have been (un)successful in their foreign policy endeavours, it will have greater legitimacy in predicting Obama's potential agency.

Thirdly, the framework does not include the impact of unforeseen events and the effect they have on foreign policy, such as the impact 9/11 had on the Bush administration. While this thesis recognises that unforeseen events can have enormous impact on how presidents approach foreign policy, the unpredictable nature of these events makes them difficult to gauge. This forced this thesis to exclude them from the equation and apply the framework *ceteris paribus*. While this does not undermine the framework *per se*, there is a great deal of room to study how unforeseen events can impact on presidential agency.

Similarly, this thesis was not able to do an extensive study into how the international environment can impact on presidential agency. It is clear from the examples and issues mentioned in this thesis, however, that this is an important aspect thereof. A potential future study could focus on this, and how Obama's presidency has been affected by the international environment.

Finally, while this thesis touched on the impact of ICT as a foreign policy instrument it is a rather recent development in the field. The implication of this is that there is still very little academic work on the topic. A proper study into how ICT and new-media influences both

foreign policy agency, as well as international perceptions of the US, *inter alia*, would be invaluable to the political science discourse.

6.4. Concluding Remarks – Hope We *Could* Believe In?

During his campaign, as well as during his first few months in office, Obama was full of rhetoric about renewing the US' image abroad and how he planned to do this. These promises have not been fully realised. A cynical take on his rhetoric would guide one to the conclusion that Obama is first and foremost a politician who sold the message that he believed would win him the White House. This is an unfair conclusion. Instead, one should assess Obama's rhetoric from a more pragmatic stance. Obama's good intentions are still subject to the same set of constraints that all presidents must endure. When Obama entered into office in January of 2009 he was arguably one of the most well placed presidents to achieve his agenda. Obama entered the White House with a resounding victory over his competition and with Democratic control over both chambers of Congress. Moreover, Obama was particularly well regarded on the international stage, as is evident from his nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize. What Obama was ultimately naïve about was the scope of the problems facing him, and the time required to address them. It is easy to stand as a presidential candidate and make proclamations about closing Guantanamo Bay and bringing home US troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, but in both cases the decision to do so has major repercussions. Furthermore, Obama came to office during the worst recession since the Great Depression and had to spend a great deal of his time and energy in the first months of his presidency dealing with domestic issues.

This leads one to the conclusion that the dip in Obama's approval ratings are not the result of him being able to achieve so little, but rather that he promised to achieve so much. By his own admission, all politicians make promises and most of these never come to fruition. The mistake Obama made was thus not to fail, but to provide hope that he would be different:

> … too many times, after the election is over, and the confetti is swept away, all those promises fade from memory, and the lobbyists and the special interests move in, and people turn away, disappointed as before, left to struggle on their own. That is why this campaign can't only be about me. It must be about us - it must be about what we can do together (Obama, 2009a: 210)

Obama sold himself as the exception to the rule and in so doing achieved what few presidential candidates have been able to do – he inspired a nation. Yet in this inspiration Obama planted the seed of his own demise as his critics were all the more intent on proving him to be more of the same. Just as the media magnified his grandeur during his campaign, now they have resorted to magnify his failures and missteps. The result is that while Obama might not have failed in absolute terms – the world is no worse off for his presidency – he has failed in relative

terms. Obama's ratings are reflective of an American people who have regained their disillusionment with government after a brief hiatus during the height of Obama's campaign of Hope. While this does not preclude his agency in foreign policy, it may result in his loss of the White House in 2012, and the loss of Democratic control of Congress in 2010. This will have significant repercussions for his agenda. While Obama will undoubtedly leave the presidency having restored a great deal of goodwill among some of the US' allies, it is doubtful that the (as yet unseen) seismic shift in the perception of the US among its more determined enemies will occur. In the final assessment, the words of Michael Gerson (2010) thus serve as a profoundly succinct summation of Barack Obama and his presidency: "All politicians fall – but not from such a height."[37]

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[37] Interestingly, an (admittedly non-scientific) poll coupled with the article on the *Washington Post* website asked users whether "[the American] nation is witnessing 'the height of Obama's political fall,' as Gerson suggests?" Out of 2,665 respondents, 61.32% said 'Yes'; 33.28% said 'No'; and 5.4% said 'Too hard to tell' (Gerson, 2010).

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