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## **BRIC COUNTRIES WITHIN FOREIGN POLICY OF THE FIRST BARACK OBAMA ADMINISTRATION**

The article reveals a growing role of the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) in the modern international relations. It proves that among these countries Russia and China received the greatest attention of the Obama administration. The August war of 2008 in Georgia became a turning point. The anti-Kremlin moods in its aftermath were strong but impermanent and relations with Russia returned to status-quo shortly. However, the mistakes of the Kremlin decision-makers brought the policy of “reset” including the plan on the European missile defence to fiasco. China also perceives the Russian-Georgian war as a dividing line in the international relations. It made a conclusion that the US military interference into regional conflicts does not take place by default. This conclusion was important in the context of forecasting the probability of the US troops stepping in, in case of CPR-Taiwan conflict escalation. The other outstanding issues in the relations between China and the US were still touching upon human rights, Tibet and growing economic and military powers of China.

**Key words:** foreign policy, United States, Barack Obama, BRIC, Russia, China.

Nowadays experts assume that the US can relatively soon leave the global stage just as preceding giant states and empires did, and the others would occupy its place. The BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) are situated in the focal point of this approach as they are considered to be the most plausible successors of the US. Yet this idea is an apparent simplification. In our point of view, the joint anti-American standing could scarcely bring such different countries as China, India and Russia together. This will not be accepted neither by the states wishing to become an integral part of the West, nor by those expecting the latter to protect them, nor by the enthusiasts of the liberal political model. The leaders, which are aware of losing their influence and power in the international scene, and which perceive the internal opposition as the “West’s hand”, usually back resistance to the US. There currently exists no one-size-fits-all ideology capable of consolidating widely different countries, which have competitive aspirations and struggle for the spheres of influence.

The issue has got considerable coverage in the literature. James Boys pointed out that Brazil, for instance, has no substantial strategic sphere of influence in its possession and instead it confines itself to South America<sup>1</sup>. Anatoliy Utkin provided a description of Russia, facing a threat of a far-reaching socio-political fiasco, which was particularly dangerous considering a remarkable shrinkage of its own energy resources. China at the same time encounters political difficulties, foremost the issue of rising middle class protests against the Communist Party dictatorship, aggravated by the economic downfall in the country<sup>2</sup>. Sanjukta Banerji Bhattacharya focuses on the internal ethnic, religious and regional problems currently faced by India, which can potentially ruin the country. That is the reason why India, being one of the most important US partners in the Southern Asia, counted on strengthening of relations with the US when Obama took office. Notwithstanding that India had witnessed a remarkable improvement of relations with the US at the time of Clinton’s presidency, now its place in the rank of the US foreign political priorities plunged<sup>3</sup>. While emphasizing importance of interests and values common to the US and India, in reality Obama takes interest in that country on two main points – nuclear issue (accession to the NPT) and deterrence of China.

The aim of the present article is to reveal, at large, the place and role of the BRIC countries and, in particular of the prioritized countries, within the foreign politics of the United States under the Obama administration.

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<sup>1</sup> Boys, J. (2014). Exploiting Inherited Wars of Choice. Obama’s Use of Nixonian Methods to Secure the Presidency. *American Politics Research*, 42, 5, 836.

<sup>2</sup> Уткин, А. (2010). Внешняя политика президента Б. Обамы. *Мир перемен*, 1, 122.

<sup>3</sup> Bhattacharya, S.B. (2013). Of Democracies, Wars and Responses to War: A Comparative Perspective on War and Security in India and the United States. *India Quarterly*, 69, 3, 224.

Obama's accession to power brought about unexpectedly tense reaction on the part of both an official Kremlin and Russian scientists. Obama was considered to be much more sober-minded than George W. Bush was; it was even recalled that his nickname in the US was "no drama Obama"<sup>1</sup>. Obama has a realistic outlook, he can hardly be suspected of being a Russophobe and of aiming to "teach Russia a lesson". Though the reasoning of Russian scholars dated by 2009 has been completely disproved by what has actually been happening since then, it is still very informative to read it. Grigoriy Mirskiy, a renowned specialist in the IR field, believed that: "Obama should understand (if he doesn't, there are some people surrounding him, who could suggest him this) that anti-American rhetoric of Russian officials and propagandists is largely superficial, simulative and ceremonial, it does not reflect real interests of people, lots of whom keep their money holdings in the West. Official Russian anti-Americanism is aimed, to a great extent, at the mass social mobilization. The US leadership may be disappointed with that, but it will not get seriously worried"<sup>2</sup>. Mirskiy concludes with saying that "...it does not matter anymore, which kind of democracy and human rights we have. In fact, why would Americans impose their understanding of the human rights"<sup>3</sup>. Russians hoped that the Obama's administration, unlike that of Jimmy Carter, would not raise an uproar over the human rights restrictions and state monopoly over mass media in Russia.

It was deemed natural for Russia that since it does not pose a real threat to the US, the countries could reach an understanding. The Russians assumed that the US could even provide bigger amounts of economic assistance. If Russia continued to be weak, poor and aware of potential partition, while still having a nuclear weapon, it would become a true nightmare for the West. The calmer the relations with Russia would be the freer Obama would act within his mainstream direction. Iran and Afghanistan are the cases where it is particularly important for Americans to build rapport with Russia, in order, for instance, to synchronize their moves over the issue of sanctions against Iran.

The August war of 2008 with Georgia became a decisive point in formation of such view of future relations with the US. It was enthusiastically pointed out by Russia that though anti-Kremlin attitude in the aftermath of the war was high, it nonetheless was very short-lived and status-quo in Russian-American relations was soon to return.

It is essential to emphasize that even the brightest Russian scholars in 2009 could not imagine Russia encroaching on the independence of Ukraine or merely raising the issue of Crimea again. Thus, there virtually existed no scenario of Obama's behaviour in case of abrupt foreign political actions of Moscow. The Ukrainian (gas) issue acquired certain relevance for the United States only as a part of the energy security problem, and at the same time Russians insisted on cooperative US-Russia solving of this problem<sup>4</sup>.

That was the issue of Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) systems placing in Czech Republic and Poland, which was considered important. The primary aim of Russia was to make US put this project into cold storage or maybe even cancel it. The new missile defence plan for Europe was heavily criticized not only in Russia but in the US as well. It was closely related to the scepticism over the New START (SNV-III) nuclear arms reduction treaty signed by presidents Obama and Medvedev in 2010 (it came into force in February, 2011). Republican Congressmen opposed any tacit agreements with Russia at the time when reduction of America's BMD was negotiated as a part of the New START<sup>5</sup>. Yet in reality, this new treaty didn't include any of the said restrictions on the future US ballistic missile defence.

Another important problem, which was optimistically perceived by Moscow in view of Obama's presidency, was Ukraine's and Georgia's accession into NATO. Kremlin decision-makers hoped that Obama at least would not boost the process. Russian standing on other subjects, including the BMD placing in Europe, depended on Obama's position over NATO enlargement.

Third issue touched upon the arms control. During his presidential campaign Obama stated that he was ready to reopen negotiations on arms control with Russia, which were suspended by Bush. It was once again emphasized that neither Russia, nor the West has any interest in heating up the confrontation over the number and quality of missiles to the degree of emergence of a global nuclear disaster danger<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Уткин, А. (2010). Внешняя политика президента Б. Обамы. *Мир перемен*, 1, 113.

<sup>2</sup> Лабинская, И. (2009). Америка и мир при Бараке Обаме. *МЭМО*, 6, 6.

<sup>3</sup> Лабинская, И. (2009). Америка и мир при Бараке Обаме. *МЭМО*, 6, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Уткин, А. (2010). Внешняя политика президента Б. Обамы. *Мир перемен*, 1, 120.

<sup>5</sup> Тарелин, А.А. (2010). Политико-экспертное сообщество США: классификация и отношение к России. *США – Канада*, 2, 23.

<sup>6</sup> Лабинская, И. (2009). Америка и мир при Бараке Обаме. *МЭМО*, 6, 7.

After the end of the Cold War Russia felt itself impotent in terms of conventional arms as compared to NATO. This made it dependent on the nuclear forces of deterrence more than ever before. The Russia's military doctrine of 2010 displays the intent to reserve the right for the first nuclear strike in case of a conventional war, provided that it was judged as a direct threat to the existence of the Russian state. Some call it a doctrine of de-escalation of any conflict through war termination by Russia. Kremlin created a forward deployment plan for sub-strategic nuclear weaponry, which presupposed its inevitable use in any full-scale war with NATO or China. At the same time though, given that Russian political leaders follow the taboo over any discussion of war with China, NATO is reckoned the only potential adversary. On the other hand, in February, 2012 Vladimir Putin endorsed the modernization programme targeted at the diminishing of Russia's dependence on nuclear weapon<sup>1</sup>.

Bilateral relations witnessed change in December, 2011 when H. Clinton, the US Secretary of State, was accused by the Russian Prime-Minister V. Putin in fomenting unrest in Russia. Putin claimed that Clinton sent "a signal to some actors in our country" with an intention of creating of uproar in the aftermath of the Parliamentary elections won by Putin's and Medvedev's "United Russia" party. Putin also added that millions of dollars "in foreign currency" were used to affect Russian politics and that Secretary of State Clinton had personally encouraged the protests after the elections. This was followed by renewal of a campaign against non-governmental organizations financed from abroad. On the eve of his second election as a president of Russia, Putin had taken an increasingly strong stand against the US interference with the Russian politics. This heightened sensibility of Kremlin is explained by the fear of recurrence of events similar to the "Colour Revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine<sup>2</sup>.

Elections in the United States and Russia held in 2012 guaranteed that important negotiations on the reduction of nuclear weaponry would be postponed until the post-inauguration period. The "reset" policy had in general run into difficulties at the break of 2011-2012, inter alia due to the NATO's plans towards the European anti-missile defence.

The other prioritized BRIC country was China. In November, 2008 Obama proclaimed a "strategic turn" towards Asia, which represented an attempt to assure regional powers that America was not going to abandon its leading role. However, full implementation of such integrated economic, diplomatic, defence and security strategy largely depended on the ability of the Obama administration to present evidence of the US economic revival.

The CPC at its XVII party congress officially proclaimed the conception of a "harmonious world". It correlates with the concept of a "large responsible state", which came into use of the Chinese leadership as a definition of China. Under the term "responsible state", they understand a "large state capable of constraining of its ambitions". Hence it was used to criticize the US as a "large state incapable of self-constraint"<sup>3</sup>. At the XVIII party congress of the CPC in 2012, Hu Jintao manifested five key provisions, which characterize the future foreign policy. These include the theories of "profound changes of international situation", "harmonious world", "common development", "mutual responsibility" and "active participation in international affairs"<sup>4</sup>. The last but not the least: Hu Jintao officially put forward a goal of quadruple increasing of the gross domestic product per capita by 2020 as compared with that of 2009<sup>5</sup>.

The world financial crisis of 2008-2009 had a significant impact on the evolution of the Chinese conceptions. On the one hand, it switched attention of the principal global actors to solving of the economic problems, thus creating new opportunities for China. On the other, given comparably low degree of China's integration into the international financial system, its overall national strength was harmed by the crisis to a lesser extent than those of more developed countries. One of the most significant outcomes of the crisis was temporal downfall of the developed countries' economic activeness in foreign markets. In this situation,

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<sup>1</sup> Cimbala, S. (2012). Missile Defenses and the Russian-United States Reset: Reflexive Confusion? *Comparative Strategy*, 31, 5, 446.

<sup>2</sup> Cimbala, S. (2012). Missile Defenses and the Russian-United States Reset: Reflexive Confusion? *Comparative Strategy*, 31, 5, 448.

<sup>3</sup> Мамонов, М. (2010). Инерция и новации во внешней политике Китая. *Международные процессы*, 8, 3, 42.

<sup>4</sup> Кременюк, В.А. (2011). Внешняя политика президента Б. Обамы: поиски выхода из кризиса. *США – Канада: экономика, политика, культура*, 6, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Ли, В.Ф. Неблоковый сценарий достижения безопасности в АТР в начале XXI столетия. Иллюзии реальности. Проблемы обеспечения безопасности в Азиатско-Тихоокеанском регионе <<http://www.isn.ruh.ru/icis.atrsec/atrsrcr.htm>>.

Beijing had enough of room to revive its strategy of entering international markets and purchasing external assets. The primary focus in this regard was on securing the supply of energy resources. It comes reasonable, as it was many times emphasized by international and Chinese experts that China's dependence on external supply of mineral resources, foremost energy resources, was very high. Deutsche Bank provides numbers, according to which, between 2008 and 2020 China's requirements of imported ironstone will grow by 380%, of copper by 600% and of coal by 7400%<sup>1</sup>.

In 2010 China became not only the main supplier of goods to the US but also its main lender. Chinese foreign exchange reserves amounted up to 2,3 billion USD, it also holds US securities in the amount of 860 billion USD, that is why it was the only state in a position to provide new loans<sup>2</sup>. US Treasury put high hopes on the incoming flow of dollars from China while Obama's crisis recovery program was to a great extent financed by means of these funds. That is how China got deeper involved into the American economic domain. Chinese economy in its turn is extremely dependent on the internal market of America. Thus, existence of close economic relations compelled China to avoid any anti-American alliances.

Democratic US administration was highly interested in the renewal of partnership with the leading states of the world, which was undermined during the times of Republican rule. Moreover, being involved into two regional wars and having limited resources, the United States could scarcely devote attention to consolidation of its positions in other regions, including Asia-Pacific. Leading Chinese analysts concluded that Obama's decision to concentrate military efforts of the US on Afghanistan and diplomatic efforts on Iran, determined his interest in China as the political power able of facilitating stabilization of both conflicts.

The war in Iraq and the North Korean nuclear program revealed a new course of development for the US-China relations. Beijing did not support the military action in Iraq but it did not oppose it as Moscow did. This behaviour resulted from the agreement between the US and China, by which they agreed that China was to abstain from voting on Iraq issue in the Security Council, and the USA were not to organize military action against North Korea<sup>3</sup>.

At the same time, Russian-Georgian conflict of 2008 was virtually the most significant new feature of the global context from the Chinese perspective. It unveiled selectiveness of the US foreign policy in terms of interference or non-interference into regional conflicts, which are of no priority for the American interests. "From the military point of view, effectiveness of intimidation mechanisms included into the foreign policy of the United States has diminished, which is witnessed by the Russian-Georgian conflict. It is the first time since the end of the Cold War that non-Western country decided to conduct warfare operation against neighbouring state and occupy its territory, and nonetheless it was not military or economically sanctioned... Absence of direct US intrusion illustrates the limits of its readiness to deploy its military forces abroad and use force against a nuclear state", this is how Chinese specialists in the field of international relations perceived the situation<sup>4</sup>. It was essential for China to conclude that the US does not take military action by default in all cases of regional conflicts, which at least slightly limit American ambitions. For the first time in a long period China possessed some additional data to forecast the plausibility of the US military interference in case of escalation of China-Taiwan conflict. In 2008 then-president of Taiwan – separatist Chen Shui-bian lost the elections. His place was taken by moderate representative of Kuomintang Ma Ying-jeou<sup>5</sup>. This way, the PRC acquired substantial ground for pursuing of its foreign policy interests. As early as 2010, China demonstrated its intention to take an exceptionally harsh stance on Taiwan. In reaction to the decision of Washington to arrange extensive transfer of arms to Taiwan, the PRC imposed sanctions on major American companies<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Мамонов, М. (2010). Инерция и новации во внешней политике Китая. *Международные процессы*, 8, 3, 46.

<sup>2</sup> Давыдов, А.С. (2010). «Китайская головоломка» администрации Б. Обамы. *Азия и Африка сегодня*, 4, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Гончар, Б. (2009). Барак Обама і зовнішньополітична спадщина Джорджа Буша - молодшого (кризові аспекти). *Вісник Київського національного університету ім. Т. Шевченка*, 96, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Мамонов, М. (2010). Инерция и новации во внешней политике Китая. *Международные процессы*, 8, 3, 46.

<sup>5</sup> Ли, В.Ф. Неблоковый сценарий достижения безопасности в АТР в начале XXI столетия. Иллюзии реальности. Проблемы обеспечения безопасности в Азиатско-Тихоокеанском регионе. <<http://www.isn.ruh.ru/icis.atrsec/atrsrct.htm>>.

<sup>6</sup> Давыдов, А.С. (2010). «Китайская головоломка» администрации Б. Обамы. *Азия и Африка сегодня*, 4, 4.

The issue of Taiwan has an important strategic context. Japan, Taiwan and Philippines together represent a string of islands situated along the Eastern coast of China and they naturally restrain China's access to the Pacific Ocean. Until China would not control at least one of the elements of this island string, it would not become a great sea power, exert its influence on the farthest borders and ensure its full safety. Thus, the annexation of Taiwan would let China break the barrier.

Since 1979, the US has no allied obligations towards Taipei. However, the "Taiwan Relations Act" obliges the United States to promote security of the island, while giving it a freedom of choice as concerns specific means of response to different situation, occurring in the Taiwan Strait. The aforementioned Act established the peculiarities of the American policy on the Taiwan issue, referred in common as the "strategic indeterminacy". It does not directly oblige the US to protect the island in case of the Chinese aggression but any military actions on the part of Beijing are viewed as a threat to peace and security of the region and a major concern of the United States<sup>1</sup>. The most threatening is yet the potential situation of a formal break-off of the island from the mainland that can provoke a Chinese military reaction. Thus, the United States continued with the policy of double deterrence of both the island and the mainland. The US policy towards the mainland has basically remained the same: America attempted to refrain China from solving the Taiwan problem by force. With regard to the island, the policy of deterrence, applied against revenge-seeking Chiang Kai-shek, evolved into deterrence of Taipei from the temptation to make use of the American promise of protection<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, Washington doesn't want to be a hostage of Taipei's actions and get involved into an armed conflict with the PRC.

The US-PRC relations are also plagued by a series of other pressing problems (human rights, Tibet). The Democratic US government completely ignored the human rights issue, due to the high priority given to stable relations with China. Neither unrest in Tibet, nor clashes in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region could prevent Washington from conducting extremely significant negotiations on harmonization of crisis-proof measures and financial regulation with Beijing.

Washington is more concerned with the growing military power of China. At the present moment, the US is the only great power dominating in the water space of East Asia and the main task of the Obama administration was to preserve this status. American naval forces control communication lines in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, which connect the countries of this region with primary oil producing areas such as the Middle East, thus substantially reinforcing strategic US positions in the region of East Asia. The use of the naval forces alone does not guarantee the superpower's dominance in the region. That's why the US began to allocate its military airbases all over the main areas of strategic importance, including Southeast Asia. The US air forces were based even in the territories of some Central Asian post-Soviet republics, as well as in Afghanistan, Iraq and in a number of the ASEAN countries<sup>3</sup>.

The only power able of preventing the US from conducting a "humanitarian intervention" against the North Korea, or other military actions, continues to be China. Assumingly, one of the greatest political disappointments for both states became their inability to soften mutual distrust as regards their long-term agendas<sup>4</sup>. Obama's attempts to establish closer cooperation were unfruitful, in spite of increased attention given to China. So, for instance, while regular high-level meetings created a stimulus for stabilization of contacts and establishment of cooperation in various domains, concrete measures agreed in these meetings, were rarely put into effect.

Thus, we can draw a general conclusion that the change of the White House head evoked unjustified expectations in many parts of the world, including Russia. De facto, a period after 2009 was the time of wasted opportunities, with Russia being far guiltier than the US. As a result, by the end of his first term in office, Obama managed merely to establish some cooperation in the Afghanistan issue, to conclude in July 2009 the treaty on transit of the American aircrafts through the Russian territory, come to an agreement over the sanctions against Iran and settle partnership in the area of civilian nuclear power.

The global financial crisis raised the role of China in the international arena. Beijing began to insist

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<sup>1</sup> Гончар, Б.М., Гончар, Ю.Б. (2013). Концепція американського світового лідерства в зовнішній політиці Б. Обами. Пахомов, Ю.М. (ред.). *США і світ XXI століття*. Київ: Центр вільної преси, 216.

<sup>2</sup> Гончар, Б.М., Гончар, Ю.Б. (2013). Концепція американського світового лідерства в зовнішній політиці Б. Обами. Пахомов, Ю.М. (ред.). *США і світ XXI століття*. Київ: Центр вільної преси, 220.

<sup>3</sup> Гончар, Б.М., Гончар, Ю.Б. (2013). Концепція американського світового лідерства в зовнішній політиці Б. Обами. Пахомов, Ю.М. (ред.). *США і світ XXI століття*. Київ: Центр вільної преси, 222.

<sup>4</sup> Индик, М., Либерталь, К., О'Хэнлон, М. (2012). Оценка внешней политики Обамы. *Россия в глобальной политике*, 3, 169.

more on the necessity of creation of a “new international financial architecture”. Stability of the US-China relations was secured by enormous common interest in bilateral economic ties. United States during the presidency of Obama strived to turn China into responsible actor of the international liberal order, which would accept basic targets and rules and contribute to achievement of common success. North Korea represents the geopolitical area, where China and the United States began to work out a strategy of cooperation as regards regional problems. The meetings, which touched upon the issue of Korea, proved that China is ready to cooperate in the field of nuclear non-proliferation. Nonetheless, China demonstrates that it is more committed to the political principles of the XX century, thus negatively affecting not only the US-China relations but also the interests of all regional actors. China, Russia and America compete for the influence over Asia, and this means that all the other states involved have to maintain an equilibrium in order to preserve their independence.

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