



## **Summary Report from the Diplomacy Dialogue**

### **The US 2012 Elections and its Implications for Foreign Policy**

*By Dr Roland 'Randy' Glean, Director of International Services.  
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## **Introduction**

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of November 2012 Barack Obama was re-elected President of the United States. While there has been criticism and disappointment expressed with the administration's approach towards foreign policy during his first term, indications are that the second term will see a more active US engagement in the Middle East, Africa and in Asia-Pacific. Against this context the Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD) hosted Dr Glean in giving his perspectives on the implications of the US elections on foreign policy. This Diplomacy Dialogue presented an opportunity to discuss the impact of Obama's re-election on the making of US foreign policy, as well as the implications for the role of the US in broader international relations.

In his opening remarks Dr Zondi, Director of the IGD, highlighted the role of the Institute in foreign policy research and encouraging dialogue from various positions. Dr Glean was welcomed to the IGD as part of his visit to South Africa which included promoting greater linkages between universities as they position themselves in international affairs.



*Dr Siphamandla Zondi, Director Institute for Global Dialogue*

### **The US 2012 Elections and its Implications for Foreign Policy**

Dr Roland Glean,

Director of International Services. Midwestern State University



*From left to right - Dr Roland Glean, Director of International Services, Midwestern State University, Texas. Mr Francis Kornegay, Senior Research Fellow Institute for Global Dialogue*

In his presentation Dr Glean indicated that these reflections were his own and did not in any way represent an official position. In considering the different US administrations in the context of foreign policy he noted that possibly the best word to describe it would be 'stability'. Where there has not really been significant change from one administration to the other. Indeed, he indicated that trends endure even across partisan lines. Influence tends to be largely exogenous events rather than changes within the US. Another word used to describe the US approach to foreign policy would be 'incremental'. It is a reaction (not reactionary) largely as the world changes and each administration finds themselves having to react to these changes, for instance in the case of Libya, which was an unanticipated change which meant that policies to needed to change.

In understanding the impact of the 2012 elections on foreign policy Dr Glean considered what happened, and what could have happened. He surmised it as 'Obama II: The sequel' which implies a continuation of the story, but that it is often not consistent because of the intervening variable called politics. Dr Glean noted that there is an underlying perception that first term presidents have to play 'coy', but are unencumbered in their 2<sup>nd</sup> term. He questioned whether this would bring about an effect like the chameleon, where there would be a significant change in the 2<sup>nd</sup> term, or rather that Obama's 1<sup>st</sup> term was more of a preview of what to expect in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and final term.

**Table: Key Foreign Policy Positions**

ISSUE	ROMNEY	OBAMA
ISRAEL	CRITICISM ON LACK OF VISIT	HONOR SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP
PALESTINIAN QUESTION	ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO EXIST	COMMITMENT TO TWO STATE
SYRIA	NO MILITARY INVOLVEMENT	TOUGH WORDS TO ASSAD
LIBYA AND THE ARAB SPRING	BENGAZI CRITICISM/EGYPT CONCERN	DEFENSIVE ON BENGAZI/MILD CREDIT CLAIMING ON EGYPT
AFGHANISTAN	CAUTIOUS CRITICISM	END WAR RESPONSIBLY
IRAQ	NO SUBSTANTIAL DIFFERENCE	NO SUBSTANTIAL DIFFERENCE
MILITARY USE	INCREASE SPENDING TO 4%	TRIM MILITARY RESPONSIBLY
FOREIGN AID	NO TARGETED CRITICISM	UTILIZE TO STRENGTHEN EMERGING NATIONS/MARKETS
IRAN	NOT RULE OUT ANY OPTION AND DETER NUCLEAR AMBITION	PRESS SANCTIONS TO DETER NUCLEAR AMBITION
AFRICA	A PASSING MENTION OF MALI	LIMITED ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
COUNTER POINTS	CLAIMED OBAMA'S POLICIES DID NOT PRESENT A VISION	CLAIMED ROMNEY WAS "ALL OVER THE MAP"

The presentation set out that US policy was largely centred on domestic issues, looking inwards rather than outwards towards the world. For instance, in the 2012 elections foreign policy questions were more of an afterthought than a central issue. Within the US the importance of the elections was portrayed as an important issue for the rest of the world by the media, but does it really matter? This is open for discussion, but it was argued, there are times where lives do depend on what happens in the US elections.

In the 2012 elections foreign policy questions did not really come up for debate, largely because there was a convergence between the two candidates; and possibly because there is an understanding that not much changes when a candidate does get elected into government. There has also been a change in that while the Republicans have lost some of their edge as the perceived 'protector' of the US, Obama has taken more of an assertive position. Yet for Obama if foreign policy questions were not raised for discussion it would not present a big risk to his campaign. In other words, as Dr Glean argued, if an issue couldn't be turned into votes then it was not worth going into for either of the candidates. Indeed, it was pointed out that there was only one notable difference in position on international relations in terms of military use. Here Romney wanted to increase spending to 4% of the national budget while Obama wanted to trim military spending.

When it came to Africa there was an initial perception that Obama would be best placed to understand and act on the problems facing Africa. This reflects a similar perception at the domestic level, where there were expectations that Obama, as an Afro-American, would be best placed to drive the policy concerns of this section of the electorate. In reality, at both a domestic and international level, Obama has not lived up to these expectations. Yet, he has been given what can be described as a 'pass' in the hope that he will be able to take up these issues in his second term. This may, however, be simplistic and counterintuitive. Indeed, it was argued that a Bill Clinton and George Bush could, and did, do more for Africa in a 1st term without the political backlash, than Obama can. But there is always the possibility that Africa receives more attention in the 2nd term.

What really matters to the US in terms of foreign policy is 1) China, 2) China and 3) China, which has seen more of a split between candidates. Questions include China as a currency manipulator, calls for free trade, and the outsourcing jobs to China. Nevertheless, when it came to light that Romney himself had sent jobs to China this neutralised it as an area in the foreign policy debate.

So what can be expected in a changing international environment? Dr Glean pointed towards a paradigm shift in engaging emerging rival/powerful nations such as China and India (with Pakistan more marginalised). This is currently framed as economic rivalry with the US depicted as a declining indispensable nation.

There will also be a reconstruction of alliances. The example used in this case was Israel, where there is a need to reconstruct relations as they cannot endure in light of current changes as well as the effects of the 'Arab Spring'. There is also a need to redefine relations with emerging nations – from junior partners to partners (including South Africa) - with a pivot in focus towards Asia. This reconfiguring of relations is necessary as it is no longer a given that countries will be 'in your camp'. The US is competing economically with states such as China and Russia. This is no longer a political/ideological dispute.

In terms of engaging the problem spots, the US continues to look at pulling out of Afghanistan, diplomatic and cautious engagement with the Arab states who remain in flux, and is likely to be more forceful on the Syrian crisis. Dr Glean posited that it is likely that there will be further tough talk, but no direct threats, to Iran and North Korea. When it comes to Africa, Mali was the only country mentioned in the US 2012 election campaign. It remains a low priority area that will see a shift in tone mostly on aid, where the US will no longer be sending experts, but be sending trainers.

In discussing what the US may expect of South Africa, Dr Glean indicated that Washington will expect leadership from Pretoria, a Captain in southern Africa and a vanguard nation. This will form part of what the US sees as having 'trusted partners' in pursuing a top-down pyramid approach within regions.



*From left to right – Dr Siphamandla Zondi, Director Institute for Global Dialogue; Dr Roland Glean, Director of International Services. Midwestern State University, Texas; Mr Francis Kornegay, Senior Research Fellow Institute for Global Dialogue*

**Discussant:**

Mr Francis Kornegay

Senior Research Associate Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD)

In reflecting on Dr Glean's presentation Francis Kornegay started out by noting that the US tends to approach international relations through identifying a number of key countries that can play a particular role. This, however, tends to be met by anti-American pushback. South Africa is particularly sensitive to being viewed as a sub-imperial agent of the US. But there is a lot of convergence within foreign policy positions - or convergent evolution where two animals could look very much alike but are unrelated.

In the US elections more generally foreign policy never features as a major election issue, but there are the exceptions such as the Vietnam War. This had large foreign policy ramifications flowing from it as did the war in Iraq, which was considered a major issue. As Obama indicated, the Iraqi war was the wrong war at the wrong time, but suggested that Afghanistan was the right war. This is because in the partisan dynamics of US, where Republicans have traditionally been portrayed as defending US interests while the democrats were considered weak on defence. Yet Obama has managed to dismantle the Republican security apparatus. This is why foreign policy issues did not feature in the 2012 elections - the Republicans had nowhere to go. Obama was strong on foreign policy while the Republicans were in a state of disarray.

Obama is looking to disengage the US from a militarised focus on foreign policy, shifting to an economic diplomacy rather than a hard power approach. Obama's emphasis is on Asia, with Africa on the back burner. But this has to do with the particular challenges [domestic] that the US has had to face. This dictates foreign policy in terms of national interest. For instance the first visit that Hilary Clinton made as Secretary of State was to China. Under the Bush administration Asia had been more peripheral, so Asia had to have a restoration of focus.

There has to some extent been an overplaying of racial dynamics. Post-apartheid Africa is no longer a controversial issue with a bi-partisan African policy set by the Democratic Party. The US does not feel itself under any pressure from Africa. But there is a possibility that with changing geo-political dynamics taking place in the rest of the world, there may be more attention given to Africa, but so far there is no indication that there is a strategic vision.

## **Discussion Session**

It was acknowledged that the presentation provided a good holistic picture of the 2012 elections and foreign policy. Questions from the floor were raised on whether there had been a change in direction of the US's approach to international relations and whether this was a status quo or revisionist posture? With reference to the domestic focus of the current US administration it was questioned whether the low emphasis on international affairs was a manifestation of a US in decline, and if this reflected a new paradigm suggesting that the US is shifting away from its 'lonely superpower' status. In response it was argued that the re-characterisation of the US role in international relations was voluntary rather than as a result of decline. It was noted that the administration wanted to change direction and facilitate changes in other countries rather than to dictate to them. Yet it was also noted in the discussion that the US is no longer a hegemon. It was also pointed out that any decline should be seen in relative terms, where parts of the world were reconstructing themselves from wars or gaining in economic momentum. In other words when other states gain momentum, there will be a relative decline, but this should not be seen as an absolute decline. It was also noted that the US is currently going through a shale gas revolution, which will mean changes in geopolitics and a rethinking of where the balances are.

In turning to the Middle East a point was raised in the discussion that the international community should do more in terms of the Palestinian question and whether Obama's 2<sup>nd</sup> term would allow more action on this. The discussion indicated that Iran could be perceived as a distraction by the Israeli lobby in order to avoid dealing with the two-state solution. As Obama faced re-elections, he was pragmatically not going to go any further on this. Iran may be considered more of a side issue, with the military establishment not looking towards a war. It was pointed out, however, that Iran also needs to engage in looking for solutions on the Palestinian question rather than just calling on the US to play the central role. But sabre-rattling by Tehran has made it harder to let go, and as a result ground had been on the two-state solution.

Linked to questions concerning the Middle East, the relations between the US and Iraq were highlighted, noting that there have been two agreements between the countries in establishing long term strategic partnerships. In light of the positive developments within Iraq, as an emerging country and as a new democracy, it was queried whether more could be done in strengthening this position. It was also noted that more could be done in terms of engagement

with Iraq, as Iraq itself is evidence of US relevance and that it could be the model for the rest of the Arab region. Furthermore as the US approaches Indonesia and Myanmar, there is an opportunity to look at Iraq and see what can be; but the seeds have been sown in setting up the tone for new opportunities

As the discussion turned to Africa it was noted that Africa does not need aid as it has resources, what is needed is an increase in technical support. It was, however, argued that Africa needs to more effectively utilise aid and that while there are exceptions (like South Africa), many countries will continue to need aid for the foreseeable future. It was also argued that there was indeed a disconnect between rhetoric and practice, but that it would be fullhardy for any external power to believe that it can 'fix' Africa. External powers initiated problems. It was also argued that Western democracy may not be the best model for Africa as it gets corrupted and leaves too many behind. Why do strong men emerge? Because that's how Africans have governed themselves historically, and it is efficient.

Although it was indicated that Obama should give attention to Africa, it was asked why he should see Africa as strategic. It was argued that in his final term Obama would be thinking of his legacy as president and that he should not leave office without making some kind of a meaningful statement on Africa. With his roots in Kenya there is scope for non-controversial policy making within East Africa with a focus on the East African Community (EAC), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern African States (COMESA) as has been the case in Asia. This will symbolically balance Obama's own family background, as a truly pan-African.

In addition to Obama's legacy it was also pointed out that Africa is emerging within international relations, raising questions of governance as the continent has never fully decolonised. Africa needs to integrate, but this is in trade and investment rather than aid. In concluding it was argued that the US often found itself hostage to its own political baggage when it comes to foreign policy with domestic circumstances often undermining what can be achieved in the international milieu.



### **Short Biography of Dr Roland 'Randy' Glean**

Randy Glean has a BA in communications from Midwestern State University (Magna Cum Laude); an MA in political science and international relations from Washington University in St. Louis and a PhD in political science and constitutional law from Washington University in St. Louis.

Since 1997, he has been a tenured political science professor and administrator at Midwestern State University. He had dedicated the past five years full time to building a successful international outreach program that has enrolled over 1500 students from more than 70 countries.

He frequently speaks at local political events on behalf of the League of Women's Voters and various civic organizations. He has work on a consultative basis for a number of governments in the field higher education and for the US Department of State as a representative presenter for the President Obama 100K Strong Initiative.

He has published and presented numerous articles on judicial processes such as plea bargaining, capital punishment, and on voter mobilization. He is in Southern Africa to cement an outreach program on behalf of Midwestern State University. He is from Brooklyn, New York and has one daughter.

### **Short Biography of Francis Kornegay**

Francis Kornegay is a Senior Research Fellow in the Emerging Powers programme. He has Masters Degrees in African Studies from Howard University and in International Public Policy from the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins. Kornegay served two stints in the US Congress as a professional staffer, among other things, developing financial sanctions legislation on South Africa. He established the Research and Evaluation Unit for the African Development Foundation, an independent US agency. In South Africa, he served as the country director of the African-American Institute (AAI) and was involved in electoral support activities. Since then, among other things, he has focused on South-South co-operation issues on which he has written and published extensively. He managed a Ford Foundation-funded project on IBSA and has organised seminars on IBSA both in South Africa and India. In Brazil, he presented a paper on South Africa as an emerging power and will present another on IBSA, BRIC and South-South co-operation at a Stellenbosch seminar in September 2010. In 2009, he authored the Global Insight on 'South Africa's South-South Dilemmas: Will a BRIC fall on IBSA. Francis is an alumnus of the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars.



The IGD is an independent foreign policy think tank dedicated to the analysis of and dialogue on the evolving international political and economic environment, and the role of Africa and South Africa. It advances a balanced, relevant and policy-oriented analysis, debate and documentation of South Africa's role in international relations and diplomacy.

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