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The Obama doctrine in the context of the US foreign policy evolution

The purpose of this article is to analyze the Obama doctrine in the context of the US foreign policy evolution since the Second World War. The American researchers suggest a vision of that evolution as a certain cycle of the US course in the world politics. Obama's foreign policy was determined by two main factors: the internal economic situation and changes in the international environment. The combination of these factors led to the existence of multi-vector tendencies in the system of foreign policy decisions. In light of this, the development of a new concept of American world leadership was initiated at the political and academic levels in the United States. The article analyzes the results of the implementation of this concept.

Key words: *the Obama doctrine, foreign policy, cyclicity, superpower, international relation, national security.*

Since the end of the 1980s, a modification of the Yalta-Potsdam order has taken place, completed by the collapse of the bipolar system in 1991. The unique status of the United States as the only superpower provided them with an opportunity to influence the course and content of international relations purposefully. The American political and academic community has faced the task of ideological grounding the strategy of US international activity under the new conditions, to present a model of a new world order and a global strategy for the long-term perspective. Obama's foreign policy was determined by two main factors: the internal economic situation and changes in the international environment. The combination of these factors led to the existence of multi-vector tendencies in the system of foreign policy decisions: on the one hand, the positions of the political parties became closer due to moods in American society and the need to develop a pragmatic course (retrenchment), on the other hand, electoral logic dictated the repulsion of the positions of the two main parties for a maximum distance, as the parties tried to avoid borrowing the ideological arsenal of the opponent, on the other hand. In light of this, borrowing the ideological arsenal of the opponent. In light of

this, the development of a new concept of American world leadership was initiated at the political and academic levels in the United States.

This problem and other related problems in political science are considered topical and are being systematically studied by both foreign and Ukrainian experts. In particular, different aspects of Obama's foreign policy are analyzed by American researchers Z. Brzezinski [9], H. Kissinger [13], H. Brands [8], C. Dueck [10], N. Gvosdev [11; 12], D. Rothkopf [16; 17], D. Sanger [18], S. Sestanovich [19] as well as by the Ukrainian scholars D. Lakishyk [1; 2], I. Pohorska [3; 4], N. Slobodian [5], V. Shamraieva [6], O. Shevchuk [7] and others.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the Obama doctrine in the context of the US foreign policy evolution since the Second World War. The American researchers suggest a vision of that evolution as a certain cycle of the US course in the world politics.

In fact, the first American statesman who openly talked about cyclicity of the US foreign policy was Henry Alfred Kissinger – National Security Advisor to the President of the United States in 1969–1975 and US Secretary of State in 1973–1977. However, he was and remains a strong opponent of such fluctuations in US policy on the international scene. According to Henry Kissinger, only the right balance between resources and national interests and the construction of a grand strategy on that base can protect the United States from extremes in foreign policy, such as imperial overstrain, on the one hand, and isolationism, on the other one. In the "*White House years*" Kissinger called his approach toward finding the right balance between the US national interests and resources on the basis of recognizing the limits of possibilities the "geopolitical one" [13]. Thus, he contributed to the return of the "geopolitics" category into the international political discourse.

The key premise of Stephen Sestanovich's "*Maximalist: America in the World from Truman to Obama*" is that the opposing strategies of maximalism and retrenchment have taken turns in shaping US actions in the world since 1945, a cycle that has played out three times so far. First, the "present at the creation" activism of the early Cold War eventually had to be followed by Dwight Eisenhower's attempt to walk America back from some of its global commitments. A second phase of high-octane ambition started by John F. Kennedy died in Vietnam and gave away to Nixonian détente in the 1970s. Ronald Reagan's zeal to win the Cold War then opened a third maximalist phase that lasted until Barack Obama. Time and again, Sestanovich argues, maximalists came to the conclusion that major crises could only be solved – and worse ones avoided – through the all-out application of American power. They did so spurred by what

they saw as the failure of their predecessors' half-hearted policies. And in similar fashion, as the wheel turned, retrenchers came to the fore on the promise of fixing the failures and cutting the costs of maximalist overcommitment [19]. As he writes: "The history of American foreign policy...is not one of dogged continuity but of regular, repeated, and successful efforts to change course" [19, p. 5]. For the US, the challenge seems to be above all to strike the right balance between the two positions. As Sestanovich concludes, the recurring dilemma is how to enjoy the rewards of maximalism without going too far [19, p. 335].

Despite the 1990s debates on the role and place of the United States in the world, Washington implemented a policy of "liberal hegemony" that envisioned an active US course towards a new world order. Moreover, the efficient economic policy of US President William Clinton meant the availability of the necessary resources for maximalist foreign policy.

In regard to the George W. Bush doctrine, experts appear least sympathetic. Hal Brands concludes that Bush had a clear "sense of mission and purpose", his administration's belief in an unparalleled opportunity to restructure the world toward freedom [8, p. 165]. This grand strategy, however, resulted from the "strategic shock" of the September 11 terrorist attacks, which demonstrated not only that the United States remained vulnerable and needed a new defense posture but also that a new long-term threat existed [8, p. 151]. Reacting to the sudden change in circumstances, Bush developed a highly moralistic worldview, resulting, for example, in the concept of preemptive attack. In the ensuing wars of Afghanistan and Iraq, the administration's management style and decision making proved inadequate. It bordered on dogmatism and arrogance and operated on flawed assumptions. While Brands offers a rather perfunctory acknowledgment at the end that history is dynamic and, given future developments, Bush's legacy may rebound, he stresses that Bush's failures offer their own insights. First, he states, "Bush's experience confirmed the truism that there is a long road between the articulation of a grand strategy and the successful implementation of that strategy". Second, and perhaps most obviously, "a flawed and overambitious grand strategy could be quite dangerous". There was "great peril in trying to be too grand" [8, p. 189].

However, the growth of crisis phenomena in US foreign policy has become not the only factor in the formation of Barack Obama's foreign policy strategy. As a result of beginning the financial and economic crisis in September 2008 the United States did not have the necessary resources for a fully-fledged global leadership based on military and economic domination [6, p. 414]. That convinced Barack Obama of the

correctness of his idea to focus on economic recovery of the country as a priority [10, p. 28].

Consequently, in general, at the end of 2008, the first phase of the second cycle of US foreign policy ended. This stage, as well as the previous one in the late 1960s and early 1970s, was characterized by an increase of the people apathy against the background of failure to realize its goals in the second Iraq war, which aggravated with the onset of the economic crisis.

However, it should be noted that Washington's behavior doesn't entirely define the American foreign policy. The system of international relations also has a significant impact on it. First of all, it manifests itself in such a cyclical phenomenon as "the rise and fall of the great powers", according to Paul Kennedy's famous book of the same name. Actually, the history of the United States as a superpower is a part of this phenomenon, but not limited to it. In addition to changing the list of possible contenders for domination in the world, the geography of their location changes, that leads to a change in the relative weight of one or another Eurasian region in the US foreign policy strategy. Thus, Zbigniew Brzezinski in his "*Strategic Vision*" says that in the 1990s the United States had become the "first truly global superpower"; since then there has been a global dispersal of power, with a weakened European Union, along with Russia, China, India and Japan all maneuvering for position. Among the three main trends characterizing contemporary international relations, Brzezinski emphasizes shifting of the world's center of gravity "from the West to the East" [9, p.16–26], since the most dynamic powers of today's world (China, India) are located there. Besides, one of them, i.e. China, seems to be today the only potential US rival for dominance in the system of international relations. In such an increasingly unstable world, Z. Brzezinski suggests, the United States remains, in the words of the former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, the "indispensable nation". Though no longer a hegemonic colossus, America remains essential, in his view, to promoting "a larger and more vital West", while at the same time playing the "role of balancer and conciliator" in Asia. There it ought to engage China "in a serious dialogue regarding regional stability" to reduce the possibility not only of American-Chinese conflicts but also of miscalculations between China and Japan, or China and India, or China and Russia [9].

In the Ukrainian scholar O. Shevchuk's view, "contradictions in the US-China relationship will exist, but their potential for conflict-relatedness will largely be offset by the growing interdependence of those countries, both in the economic and in political areas. The methods, by which

Chinese diplomacy achieves its goals, combine active economic policy with soft forms of spreading its influence. Such an approach does not cause a sharp opposition from the United States that seeks to develop common mechanisms for finding solutions in the most critical areas for themselves" [7, p. 13].

So, based on the cyclical logic, the United States in the beginning of 2009 have appeared in the worst situation since the 1970s in terms of foreign policy. Therefore, it is not surprising that the reaction of the new White House, headed by Democrat Barack Obama, seems to be similar to the policy of Republican Richard Nixon: in both cases the United States have faced with the task of finding a balance between available resources and the relevant international commitments, as well as the need to distribute attention between external and internal policies. Anyway, US foreign policy has returned to the retrenchment in the broad sense.

However, there is an appreciable difference between foreign policy of the Nixon-Kissinger' and Barack Obama' era. The White House of the early 1970s understood the danger to the world order if the United States tried to abandon its leadership position in the world completely. The main challenge for the USA, as Kissinger said, was to build a new practice of international relations in the process of destroying the old one, while not allowing the system of international relations to collapse. That could be achieved not by creating obstacles to the path of historical changes, but through the skillful use of new changes in order to obtain new tools, forces and opportunities for political maneuvering. The United States must engage its main opponents in a managed format of tripartite relations, abandon those commitments that they are not able to implement, while retaining trust in the eyes of the main allies, and ultimately turning themselves into a center of more stable and profitable global balance of power. Due to the dynamic and purposeful foreign policy, the United States will be able to successfully survive the period of their partial decline [8, p. 60]. In other words, it meant that, despite the partial strategic retreat and concentration, the United States should continue to pursue an active foreign policy strategy at the tactical and operational levels regarding the use of the opportunities created by the system of international relations. The best examples of the successful implementation of such a course by the Nixon-Kissinger tandem are the so-called "Opening of China" in 1972 or "shuttle diplomacy" during the 1973 Judgment Day war. This allowed Washington to take a dominant position in the US-China-USSR geopolitical triangle or actually contribute to establishing a balance between Israel and Egypt, which gave rise to a peaceful settlement and marginalization of the USSR position in the Middle East. This policy

ultimately helped the United States to survive the worst period in their history, while not abandoning the status of the world leader.

In turn, the Obama foreign policy was based on compromise and reconciliation in international relations. Colin Dueck characterized the Obama Doctrine as a centralized policy, purposely ambiguous and always with an ear to the ground on domestic issues [10]. In *"The Obama Doctrine: American Grand Strategy Today"*, Dueck argues that the President has said that this was the time for nation building at home, and his global nonintervention policy has allowed him to focus on that plan. In Dueck's view, Obama does "have a kind of implicit grand strategy". It consists of "overarching American retrenchment and accommodation internationally, in large part to allow the President to focus on securing liberal policy legacies at home" [10, p. 25–33].

Indeed, the analysis of the 2010 US National Security Strategy edition provides evidence for such conclusion. This document explicitly states: "At the center of our efforts is a commitment to renew our economy, which serves as a wellspring of American power" [14, p. 2]. In addition, one of the main leitmotifs of the document is the idea that new global challenges and shortcomings form the basis for cooperative rather than conflicting relationships between major world powers. It also fully corresponds to Obama's views on the essence of international relations. Therefore, the new version of the National Security Strategy of the United States, which appeared in February 2015, is a logical continuation and implementation of the main ideas of the President. On the one hand, this document more realistically assesses the perspectives for partnership between major powers, while clearly mentions that China's rise and Russia's aggression significantly impact the global balance of power and international security, on the other hand. However, despite this, "a strong, innovative and growing US economy" is still identified as a priority [15, p. 2–4].

However, in Dueck's view, America's position abroad has deteriorated because of Obama's grand strategy. Early on, the President announced that he would take concrete steps to eliminate nuclear weapons around the world. At the end of his second term, he was farther from that goal than when he took office, and not only because his pending deal with Iran legitimizes the world's leading state sponsor of terror as a threshold nuclear power and is likely to spark a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. North Korea has defiantly tested its nuclear weapons and long-range missiles. Nuclear powers Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, India, and Pakistan have shown no inclination to abandon nuclear arms. Israel continued to decline to confirm or deny possession of nuclear weapons.

Despite Obama administration's engagement with Iran, reset with Russia, and pivot to Asia, leaders in Tehran, Moscow, and Beijing continue to view America as an impediment to their regional ambitions. All three nations have grown more assertive during Obama's tenure. This failed accommodation of rivals – combined with an energetic retrenchment that is substantially reducing the size of the U.S. military – has "unnerved American allies in Central and Eastern Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East." [10, p. 7, 65–75].

Colin Dueck suggests that Obama has also exaggerated his successes in combatting transnational terrorism. Al-Qaeda has become a growth enterprise; affiliates have spread throughout the Middle East. In Syria, Obama has vacillated, moving from support for President Bashar al-Assad to calls for his removal, from acquiescence in his reign to lukewarm support for the rebels. Obama precipitously withdrew all American troops from Iraq in 2011 to honor a reckless campaign pledge, thereby opening the door to radical Islamists who now control much of the northwestern region of the country.

Thus, according to Colin Dueck, "the essential problem with the Obama Doctrine is that it is based upon a sincere but fundamentally mistaken and unrealistic theory of international relations". Obama seems to believe that international conflict primarily arises from misunderstanding, and that therefore greater conciliatoriness by the United States will yield dramatic improvements in international cooperation. In the real world, however, where all-too-many international conflicts spring from adversaries who understand all too well each other's irreconcilable ambitions, retrenchment and accommodation by the world's sole superpower signal weakness and generate disorder [10].

David Rothkopf in his *"National Insecurity: American Leadership in the Age of Fear"* suggested a slightly different assessment of the effectiveness of Barack Obama's foreign policy. Rothkopf examines the construction of the President's foreign policy team, the failure of Richard Holbrooke's AfPak shop within the State Department and of George Mitchell's efforts in the Middle East, the illusory "pivot" to Asia and "reset" with Russia, the secret outreach to Iran, and the flat-footed response to the Arab Spring, the drone war, and the widespread and largely unknown (until the Snowden disclosures) cyberwar. However, even this long-time supporter of the Democratic Party, comparing the foreign policy of George W. Bush's second-term team (2005–2009) and Barack Obama's administration since January 2009, also drew paradoxical conclusions. Although Bush could not, for objective reasons, correct his main mistake – the surge in Iraq with all the relevant consequences – he learned to be an independent leader, who

could go through difficult decisions, such as increasing the US military contingent in Iraq since 2007 in order to end civil war there [16]. Meanwhile, the administration of Barack Obama and the President often show hesitation at critical moments and even demonstrate a tendency to deviate from the previously declared course, as demonstrated by the refusal to punish Bashar Assad's regime in early September 2013 in response to the use of chemical weapons. Besides, David Rothkopf criticizes the Obama administration for the closed mechanism of decision-making, which involves mainly those who contributed to his victory in the 2008 elections. Even such a grand initiative as "rebalancing toward Asia," which had objective preconditions when Barack Obama came to power, was initiated by the State Department headed by Hillary Clinton. Meanwhile, the White House, which actually seized this initiative, did not have enough realistic efforts to implement that strategy – it is now used to say that "rebalancing to Asia" is nothing more than a declaration in the absence of real steps to implement this ambitious and absolutely necessary plan [17, p. 203–230]. Finally, what Rothkopf finds is a series of foreign policy extremes that has left the U.S. without a clear sense of identity and direction.

Thus, in a view of the most researchers of the Obama doctrine, the idea that "after the massive expenditures for conflicts that marked the first decade of the 21st century, America would have a period of quiet in which to rebuild its economic might and return rejuvenated to the world stage", has led to negative consequences [11]. In 2014, as Nicholas Gvozdev notes, "Washington seems to have embarked on an overly ambitious plan of "triple containment" to counter any expansion of Iranian influence in the Middle East, Russian influence in the Eurasian space and Chinese influence in East Asia. But it has not articulated the strategic rationale for such a measure or generated the political support necessary for devoting the expenditure of the necessary resources to give such an approach better odds of achieving success" [12]. "The challenge in the current world is that, for the first time since early in the Cold War, the USA have more of a risk of crises in multiple regions turning into broader conflict" [20]. Thus, Washington has faced such a phenomenon as "asymmetry of attention" – despite the fact that in each case the US surpasses their potential competitors by all the power parameters, Washington can not concentrate 100 % of its attention and resources to counteract a particular country or threat. The key problem for the United States seems to be the lack of a genuine grand strategy that would give the Obama administration the opportunity to identify relevant priorities based on the country's national interests and then allocate the necessary resources to achieve its goals [18].

N. Slobodian considers the Obama doctrine as controversial one "in its effort to combine, on the one hand, the attempt to bring Washington's military strategy into line with the geopolitical realities and financial and economic resources of the United States, giving priority to international cooperation and interaction in resolving conflict situations, and, on the other hand, the further development of US military-strategic potential in the context of fierce competition with other world's centers of power, including Russia, to achieve the indivisible uncontested dominance in strategic regions of America, leaving the right in emergency case to make one-sided decision on the use of military force" [5, c. 63]

So, most experts conclude that the Obama doctrine, as an attempt to respond to the American foreign policy crisis, did not work at all. Of course, the question how it contributed to the intensification of the challenges for the existing international order such as Russian and Chinese revisionism is controversial one, since, according to Western authors, it had objective preconditions such as the Rise of China or Russia's Resurgence. However, it's obvious that implementation of the Obama Doctrine left the United States unprepared both conceptually and materially to meet the challenges that started to crystallize in 2014.

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"Доктрина Обама" в контексті еволюції зовнішньої політики США

Метою цієї статті є аналіз доктрини Обама в контексті еволюції зовнішньої політики США після Другої світової війни. У працях американських дослідників пропонується погляд на цю еволюцію як на певну циклічність курсу США на світовій арені. Зовнішня політика Обама була обумовлена двома головними чинниками: внутрішньою економічною ситуацією та змінами міжнародного середовища. Поєднання цих

чинників викликало багатовекторні тенденції у системі прийняття зовнішньополітичних рішень. З огляду на це у США на політичному та академічному рівнях була ініційована розробка нової концепції американського світового лідерства. У статті аналізуються результати реалізації цієї концепції.

Ключові слова: *доктрина Обами, зовнішня політика, циклічність, наддержава, міжнародні відносини, національна безпека.*

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"Доктрина Обамы" в контексте эволюции внешней политики США

Целью этой статьи является анализ доктрины Обамы в контексте эволюции внешней политики США после Второй мировой войны. В работах американских исследователей предлагается взгляд на эволюцию как на определенную цикличность курса США на мировой арене. Внешняя политика Обамы была обусловлена двумя главными факторами: внутренней экономической ситуацией и изменениями международной среды. Сочетание этих факторов вызвало многовекторные тенденции в системе принятия внешнеполитических решений. Учитывая это, в США на политическом и академическом уровнях была инициирована разработка новой концепции американского мирового лидерства. В статье анализируются результаты реализации этой концепции.

Ключевые слова: *доктрина Обамы, внешняя политика, цикличность, сверхдержава, международные отношения, национальная безопасность.*