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**DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES OF THE UNION
DIRECTORATE B
- POLICY DEPARTMENT -**

NOTE

on

**The US Presidential Campaign:
Update and Outlook**

Abstract:

In preparation for the 64th Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue (Ljubljana, 24-27 May 2008), this notes provides an update on the campaign after the 20 May primaries, as well as a comparative outlook on the prospective candidates' political stance regarding various issues, both international and domestic.

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A. OUTLOOK ON NOMINATIONS

As the national conventions inch closer, the picture is becoming clearer on who the presidential nominees will be for the Democratic and Republican parties. ***Senator John McCain of Arizona*** has already surpassed the amount of votes needed to attain the nomination for the Republican Party. On the Democratic side, while ***Senator Hillary Rodham-Clinton of New York*** remains as a candidate, the reality of the situation is that ***Senator Barack Obama of Illinois*** is presumed to be the Democratic nominee for President of the United States.

Including the results from the most recent primaries in Oregon and Kentucky, Senator OBAMA leads the Democratic delegate count with 1,956 total delegates (307 being superdelegates) compared with Senator CLINTON's 1,776 total delegates (279 being superdelegates). 2,026 delegates' votes are needed for either Democrat to attain the party's nomination for president. With only three races left and 245 votes left to be distributed, Senator OBAMA needs 70 votes to clinch the nomination, compared to 250 votes needed for Senator CLINTON.

It is expected however that Senator CLINTON will remain an official candidate until after the last day of the primary elections (elections being held in South Dakota and Montana on 3 June), where she will then call for party unity behind Senator OBAMA.

Speculation is rife concerning the choice of Vice President for both nominees. On the Republican side, former candidate Mike HUCKABEE (former governor of Arkansas) is the pundits' favorite choice, although the list includes potentials such as Rob PORTMAN (former US Trade Representative), Condoleezza RICE (US Secretary of State), Joe LIEBERMAN (Senator, I-Connecticut), Kay Bailey HUTCHINSON (Senator, R-Texas) and Tim PAWLENTY (Governor, R-Minnesota).

For the Democrats, the Vice Presidential field is equally vast and speculative, with such names as Hillary CLINTON (Senator, D-New York), Ted STRICKLAND (Governor, D-Ohio), Wesley CLARK (former NATO commander), Bill RICHARDSON (Governor, D-New Mexico), and Joe BIDEN (Senator, D-Delaware), just to name a few.

The selection of vice presidential candidates will be made following the national conventions of both parties.

B. COMPARING THE CANDIDATES' POLICIES

While it is too early in the presidential election race for concrete policies, the candidates have expressed general outlines for the policy fields listed below:

1. The War in Iraq

Senator McCain has stated that he can 'win the war in Iraq by 2013'. He has been a leading advocate of the 'surge' and counterinsurgency strategy carried out in Iraq. He cites that since the change in American policy, sectarian and ethnic violence has been reduced by 90 percent, and civilian and coalition forces deaths have fallen by 70 percent. He has stated that he will continue this strategy if elected president.

Senator McCain has called on Iraq's neighbors to do more to promote regional stability by directly investing profit from their oil exports into Iraq. He has also called for the United States to bolster its regional military posture to make clear to Iran and Syria that they must change their behavior.

Senator Obama has stated that he is the only candidate to oppose the Iraq War from the beginning (as he had not yet been elected to the US Senate when Congress approved funding military operations in Iraq). He has made it part of his presidential platform that most US Armed forces would return from Iraq within 16 months; instead launching diplomatic and humanitarian initiatives to bring stability to the country. He has called to expand services to Iraqi refugees by at least \$2 billion (€1.2 billion). He has pledged that neighbor countries such as Syria and Iran should be involved in developing regional stability.

2. Iran

Senator McCain has stated that he wishes to retain a strong military posture in the Middle East to deter Iran. He is opposed to negotiating with the Iranian government.

Senator Obama has stated that he wishes to be diplomatic with Iran, offering the country the choice of increased international pressure or incentives if they stop their belligerent rhetoric. Incentives include membership to the World Trade Organization, economic investments, and a move toward normal diplomatic relations. He has called for direct presidential negotiations between the countries.

Last week, President BUSH was delivering a speech at the Knesset to mark the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the State of Israel, where he stated that appeasement to terrorists and radicals would be like appeasement to Nazi Germany. While the White House has stated that Mr. BUSH's comments were targeted to former President Jimmy CARTER, who had met with Hamas leaders, Senator OBAMA took the comment on himself. Senator McCain supported President BUSH, saying that he too would not negotiate with Hamas until it recognizes Israel. This incident has only added fuel to the fire over the differences of foreign strategy between Senator McCain and OBAMA.

3. Restoring US Leadership

Senator McCain hopes to see a functioning 'League of Democracies', an organization of like-minded countries that could apply pressure on Sudan to agree to a multinational peacekeeping force for the country. He is supportive of Israel and will only accept a Palestinian government when it recognizes Israel.

Senator OBAMA has said that his government would open dialogue with friends and foes of the United States. He is supportive of a two-state solution between Palestine and Israel. He hopes to expand the diplomatic corps of the United States, and to open more consulates in Africa. Senator OBAMA is a keen supporter of the Millennium Development Goals, and wishes to double the US's foreign assistance to \$50 billion (€32 billion).

Senator OBAMA has called for more emphasis on NATO, and desires to call NATO allies to invest more in reconstruction and stability efforts, streamlining the decision-making process and giving NATO commanders in the field more flexibility.

Senator OBAMA also wishes to focus on East Asia, assisting South East Asian countries to develop infrastructure and ensure that China plays by international rules.

4. Nuclear Weapons

Senator McCain has called for the deployment of a nuclear missile defense system, in order to deter rogue regimes and possible competitors from attacking the United States.

Senator OBAMA desires to strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. He has called for ending the development of nuclear weapons, working with Russia on decreasing nuclear stockpiles, and expanding the ban on intermediate ballistic missiles between Russia and the United States.

5. Climate Change and the Environment

Senator McCain wishes to establish a market-based system to curb greenhouse gas emissions and mobilize technology development that is kinder to the environment. He proposes a cap-and-trade system that would set limits on greenhouse gas emissions. By 2012, he desires to return emissions to 2005 levels, and by 2030, 34 percent below 2005 levels. The system would encompass electric power, transportation fuels, commercial business and industrial business – small businesses would be exempt. Initially, participants would be allowed to either make their own reductions or purchase 'offsets' – financial instruments representing a reduction, avoidance, or sequestration of greenhouse gas emissions. The fraction of greenhouse gas emissions reductions permitted via offsets would decline over time.

To support the cap-and-trade system, Senator McCain proposes that the federal government will create 'emission permits' that will be auctioned off to support the development of advanced technologies.

Senator McCain expressed interest for the United States to be a leader in the United Nations negotiations on this issue, providing incentives in negotiated agreement with India and China.

Senator McCain has also called for the construction of 20 new nuclear power plants.

Senator OBAMA wishes to implement a cap-and-trade program to reduce carbon emissions by 2050 to 80 percent below 1990 levels. His intermediate target is to bring carbon emissions back to 1990 levels by 2020. The cap-and-trade system would be a 100% allowance auction system, where any polluter would be obliged to participate. Revenue generated by the auctions would be used to support the development and deployment of clean energy.

Senator OBAMA has called for \$150 million (€95 million) to be invested over 10 years to advance next generation bio-fuels and renewable energy technology.

Senator OBAMA has stated his desire to re-engage the United States with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, as well as to create a new forum comprised of the largest greenhouse gas emitting countries, much like the G8.

Senator OBAMA sees it unlikely to meet aggressive climate goals without nuclear energy, but has said there is no future for expanding nuclear energy unless there is a public-right-to-know, nuclear fuel is secure, nuclear waste is contained and safe. He is against the Yucca Mountain nuclear disposal center.

6. International Trade

Senator McCain has called for the lowering of trade barriers. He believes that the United States should engage in multilateral, regional and bilateral efforts to reduce barriers to trade. He believes this will strengthen the US dollar. He voted yes to establish the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1993. He stated, "Free trade is something I think is vital to the future of America," and has called himself "the biggest free marketer and free trader that you will ever see."

Senator OBAMA said he would immediately call the leaders of Mexico and Canada to try to amend the North American Free Trade Agreement. He would also eliminate tax breaks for companies that are moving overseas. He stated, "We also have to have an intentional strategy on the part of the federal government to make sure that we are reinvesting in those communities that are being burdened by globalization and not benefiting from it."

Senator OBAMA desires to review CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement) and other types of agreements allegedly putting American workers at a disadvantage. He has called for pressure on the World Trade Organization to enforce trade agreements and stop countries with unfair subsidies on exports. Senator OBAMA calls for the strengthening of intellectual property rights, as well as pushing China to end pegging to the US dollar.

7. Social Security (Pensions)

Senator McCain has called for the privatization of social security. He is opposed to tax increases for social security and for private accounts. Senator McCain proposes a frank discussion with the American people on the ways to fix social security and the problems that will face the younger generations of Americans when they are of pension age.

Senator OBAMA is against the privatization of social security. He wants to look at ways to strengthen the payroll tax system, which currently only diverts money to pensions from the first \$102,000 (€64,700) a worker makes. He would like to see an increase in the payroll tax cap. He would like to see social security sustained at least until 2050. He also hopes to eliminate all income taxation on seniors making less than \$50,000 (€31,700) per year. Senator OBAMA also calls for companies to fully disclose their pension investments, including full details about which projects have been invested in, the performance of those investments and appropriate details about probably future investments. Finally, he calls for bankruptcy laws to focus on protecting workers over lender banks, so that if a company goes bankrupt, pensioners do not lose their retirement schemes.

8. Health Care (Health Insurance)

Senator McCain opposes federally mandated universal health care. He has called for increasing awareness and promoting the use of existing children's health insurance programs while expanding community health centers. He supports health care tax dividends for low-income Americans, medical malpractice reform, improving electronic record-keeping, expanding health savings accounts, and encouraging small businesses to band together to negotiate lower rates with health care providers.

Senator OBAMA has stated he would create a national health insurance program for individuals who do not have employer-provided health care and who do not qualify for other existing federal programs. This would allow individuals to choose between the new public insurance program or from among private insurance plans that meet certain coverage standards. He would require employers who do not provide health coverage for employees to pay into the national health insurance program. He would not mandate individual coverage for all Americans, but require coverage for all children. He would also allow individuals below age 25 to be covered through their parents' plans. Costs for Senator OBAMA's health initiative are estimated between \$50 billion (€31.7 billion) and \$65 billion (€41.2 billion), to be paid for by eliminating President BUSH's tax cuts for those earning over \$250,000 (€158,745).

9. Human Dignity

Senator McCain seeks to overturn Roe vs. Wade, the controversial law that allows abortion in the United States. His alternative is to promote adoption.

Senator McCain believes that marriage is between one man and one woman, and that the states and the people should have the opportunity to define marriage, not the judicial system.

Senator McCain supports the death penalty.

Senator OBAMA supports the right to choose an abortion.

Senator OBAMA supports full civil unions and federal rights for homosexuals, although he opposes same-sex marriage. He opposes any constitutional ban on same-sex marriages and wishes to repeal the US Armed Forces policy of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'.

Senator OBAMA says he supports the death penalty only in the most heinous circumstances. He however questioned the judicial method of death penalty in his home state of Illinois, which led to a moratorium in the state.

10. Other Issues

Although he only has a mediocre rating by the NRA, *Senator McCain has been recently courted by the National Rifle Association*, for his commitment to Americans' right to bear arms (Second Amendment). He sponsored legislation requiring background checks at gun shows but voted against a 10-year extension of the assault weapons ban. He opposed legislation requiring trigger locks for handguns and opposed the 1994 crime bill, which contained the assault weapons ban.

Senator OBAMA has stated that he believes that guns should be kept away from children and criminals, while he still respects the Second Amendment. He supports extending the assault weapons ban and a national law against carrying concealed weapons, with exceptions for retired police and military personnel. He supports limiting gun sales to one per month.

Senator OBAMA has called for food products sold to Americans have a country of origin label.

Timeline

MAY 2008

27 Idaho Republican primary

JUNE 2008

1 Puerto Rico Democratic primary
3 Montana Democratic primary
New Mexico Republican primary
South Dakota primary

AUGUST 2008

25-28 Democratic National Convention in Denver, Colorado

SEPTEMBER 2008

1-4 Republican National Convention in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota
26 Presidential debate in Oxford, Mississippi

OCTOBER 2008

2 Vice Presidential debate in St. Louis, Missouri
7 Presidential debate in Nashville, Tennessee
15 Presidential debate in Hempstead, New York

NOVEMBER 2008

4 Election Day