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**New Challenges Abroad With Obama as President
African American Leadership
By Dr. Ronald Walters, PhD
BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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As President Barack Obama heads abroad he also heads into a difficult role as President of the United States in critical arenas.

At the G20, he will be in an arena where the financial responsibilities of those countries for their former colonial territories (many of them in Africa) is at issue and where outlying pledges for economic assistance are critical to the viability of countries that are suffering. Meanwhile, these countries and their former colonial subjects as well are now suffering from the global economic crisis and there are new questions as to whether they are able to meet their pledges - considering that they formerly did not. This means that it may be difficult for Obama to leverage his out-sized popularity among Europeans to achieve concrete results at the G20 meeting.

In this arena, there are rumors that some of the key countries are not prone to follow the lead of the U. S. in putting into place stimulus packages, as was done in the U. S. In fact, there is considerable resentment against the U. S. for creating this mess in the first place, because part of the cause is seen to reside in the deregulation of the financial institutions contributing to runaway capitalism.

However, Americans should also understand that part of the resentment relates to the weakening of the safety net by politicians of both parties, such that citizens don't have the income to spend the economy out of the slump. Europe has kept strong welfare, unemployment and worker support systems, but we have just emerged from an era when the weakening safety net means that Americans are now on their own. So, President Obama will have a tough time giving advice to Europeans about how to fix their economies.

This reluctance to follow the American lead will doubtless flow over to the NATO meeting because of the fact that so many countries were burned by George Bush's actions. President Obama has recently announced a new Afghanistan-Pakistan policy

that is narrower than the Bush policy, related to engaging Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, not "building democracy" there as the primary aim. He punctuated that by sending 17,000 troops to Afghanistan as the request of his generals and 4,000 trainers to work with the Pakistani military, key to confronting the Taliban on the critical border, especially in the Khyber Pass region.

The President said on a recent interview with Bob Schaefer of CBS that he is aware of the difficulty other countries have had engaging the Taliban in Afghanistan and that he want to use both military and diplomatic and economic assistance tools to achieve the goal of finding Osama bin Ladin and weakening the ability of his organization to strike at the U. S. That said, he could still be vulnerable to the neocons. I am suspicious when Bill Kristol agrees with the President and suggests that one of his aims is to "pacify the country" of Afghanistan.

Part of the delusion of the Bush strategy was to pacify, stabilize - and Americanize - Iraq to such an extent that it joined the Israeli side of the Middle East ledger. So, one hopes that American foreign policy in Afghanistan is even narrower, given the possibility that it will take a long war to "bring democracy" to that country as an indirect way of converting the Taliban to the war against Al Qaeda.

Part of the caution here is vested in putting too many eggs into the Pakistani basket, such that if the basket burst, we will be holding a rotten set of options. Pakistan is key to that struggle, but it is also an unstable ally with a weak government, and probably parts of it are aligned with the Taliban. So, it is logical for President Obama to say that we will assist Pakistan, but ask for greater accountability - the question is whether they can provide it, and if they can't what are our options. President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan is no better bet because of the extent of corruption, drug commerce and lack of an effective offense against the Taliban.

Given his set of circumstances, the Obama administration should not give in to the generals' future undoubted requests for more troops and a wider war in Afghanistan, setting us right back where we were in Iraq. Do we have an alternative? Yes. But then, he might have to use some his popularity at home to keep in perspective the primacy of the domestic political economy for now and into the foreseeable future.

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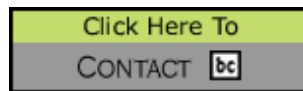
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