

**F**ew personnel decisions receive the same kind of global attention as the election of the President of the United States. And with good reason, since the ideas and utterances of the holder of the highest office in the last remaining superpower, and still the strongest military and economic power, have all sorts of consequences for the dynamics of international politics. One Latin American commentator, in consideration of the far-reaching consequences of the US presidential election for other world regions, has remarked that it is neither democratic nor just that only US citizens can participate in this election, to the exclusion of those affected by US policies abroad.

To be sure, people can only embody structural trends and influence them to a greater or lesser extent, but they cannot reverse or disregard them. Nevertheless, in relation to the 2008 presidential election in particular there is intense discussion and speculation concerning the next president's scope for action and the positions of the most promising candidates on important international issues. Not only will the upcoming election definitively bring the Bush era to an end after eight years, but on all sides there are expectations, hopes, and desires for a paradigm change in US foreign policy.

When it first came to power, the Bush government stuck to the maxim that it would get involved in the internal affairs of other countries as little as possible, and in his election campaign Bush professed »humility« in foreign policy in contrast to Clintonian interventionism. The presidential candidate declared that military intervention was no substitute for a proper policy. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, however, the Bush government fundamentally revised its foreign policy strategy. In the National Security Strategies of 2002 and 2006 administration strategists enshrined a reduction in the importance of long-term alliances and international institutions for US foreign policy, developed the traditional right to take preventive measures into a new doctrine of preventive war, and propagated forced democratization as a solution to the problem of terrorism, in particular in the Middle East. It soon became clear, however, that in Iraq the Bush government had bitten off more than it could chew and was caught in a military quagmire. The fact that neither weapons of mass destruction nor any evidence that the Saddam regime had been involved in the September 11 attacks were discovered after the invasion of Iraq led important allies to distance themselves from the USA and resulted in a loss of legitimacy, both internationally and domestically. After these failures the Bush administration began to take alliances and multi-

lateralism seriously again and »democratization« became the core element of foreign policy strategy.

In this issue of INTERNATIONAL POLITICS AND SOCIETY Daniel Drezner shows, on the basis of opinion polls, that Bush's foreign policy, including the democratization strategy, is very unpopular and concludes that under the next administration there will be no continuation of it. In fact, the Democrat candidates are at one with the Republicans that foreign policy strategy will aim at reducing dependence on energy imports, prioritizing multilateral solutions, and increasing US capacity for peacekeeping operations and institution-building in crisis states. To be sure, there are significant differences between the candidates in relation to the Iraq war and the »War against terrorism.« As regards transatlantic relations, at the very least a clear improvement in the climate may be expected, which could represent an important step towards improved cooperation. However, there are a number of disputed issues, such as agricultural subsidies, support for Israel, and sanctions against Cuba, which are likely to maintain transatlantic differences regardless of whether a Democrat or a Republican moves into the White House.

If there is to be some sort of transatlantic rapprochement far-reaching differences concerning the security debate have to be worked out, as Dirk Schmittchen and Holger Stritzel show in relation to the Rogue State metaphor. Since the end of the East–West conflict this metaphor has played an important role in the US strategy debate. In Germany, for example, perceptions of countries designated in the USA as *rogue states* are markedly different. The stigmatization of other nations gives rise to either skepticism or outright rejection in secular Europe where the reduction of international actors in terms of good and evil inspired by religious considerations has little purchase.

Stefan Laszlo's analysis, which closely examines changes in US religious politics, shows clearly that the days of militant and religious conservatism are numbered. For a quarter of a century there has been a close alliance between the Christian Right and the Republican Party in the USA. Furthermore, the Democrats have recently begun to try to make themselves more attractive to religiously motivated and, in particular, evangelical Christian voters, and have already experienced some (electoral) success. Rapprochement is made easier not least by the fact that the Democrats are closer than the Republicans to significant parts of the evangelical movement on such issues as combating poverty, environmental protection, and fairer wealth distribution. The Christian Right is

currently experiencing a political shake-up; moreover, at present it has no political leader who might be in a position to accentuate the current polarization.

Alongside the focus theme, Stephan Klecha examines the complex negotiation processes on which European social policy is based. Mary Martin discusses the results of the European military mission in the Congo. Roger Hällhag looks at the political potential of Party Internationals and what use might be made of it. Finally, Regina Bernhard and Christian Kellermann analyse alternative approaches to dealing with debt crises.