

THE PROBLEM OF CHANGE STILL REMAINS

Alexander Cockburn



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RJ Dear Mr Cockburn, how would you summarize America's current policy towards Russia? What do you think their agenda will look like in the run-up to the 2012 elections? Will America continue to act according to the 'Biden doctrine,' whose strategy is to 'not quarrel with the Russians, and then they will die out on their own,' or is there a kind of Obama stagnation which could come to an end by 2012?

The relations between America and Russia could be summarized by this trend, by the effects of Obama stagnation. In terms of the agenda behind these relations, we should say that their relatively calm nature so far depends on many things, such as Russian initiatives on arms control, the attitude of Russia towards possible NATO expan-

sion, and of course the Iranian issue, which is the main issue at the moment.

RJ Of the political, economic, and cultural, which aspects of thought should a Presidential candidate develop in order to gain the support of the country? Which set of topics are likely to become urgent by 2012?

Right now, mainstream America is anti-Wall St. and big business in general. The reason is clear and obvious — it was their greed and corruption that helped bankrupt America. Hence, the SEC civil suit and criminal complaints launched against Goldman Sachs — the immensely wealthy and powerful bank — are very popular. **Obama's rating shot up immediately after these measures were introduced**, despite the fact that he received huge amounts of money from GS in his 2008 campaign, and that many of the bank's former officials now serve in his administration.

RJ During his campaign, Obama's slogan was 'change.' What do you think will become the most popular slogans in the 2012 campaign? Are they going to be new and different, or are they going to be a logical elaboration of those of 2008?

It's too early to give any clear answer concerning 2012 campaign slogans. There are too many imponderables, like the extent and strength of any economic recovery, the state of the housing market, of employment numbers, even of developments in Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc. Of course, things also depend heavily on the outcome of the mid-term elections, and the shape of the US Senate.

Democrats will most certainly continue to use their 2008

'change' theme, just as they're planning to do for the mid-term elections this year. To quote David Plouffe, Obama's prime political strategist, 'This country is at a crossroads. We are trying to boost the economy in the short-term while at the same time create long-term projects in health care, energy, education, and financial reform that will lay a strong foundation for decades to come.'

In other words, 'We promised change. Change takes time, particularly if Republicans only say No. But we're delivering on that promise. We are rebuilding America.'

RJ Will the topic of state involvement feature heavily in the 2011-2012 campaign? Will radical conservative forces in the US be able to influence the outcome of the electoral campaign?

The Republicans will likely charge that 'state involvement' — i.e. the Obama administration — has bankrupted America with ill-advised interventions such as the stimulus package, and now with attempts at Health Care reform. **The agenda will, in rhetorical and even substantive terms, lean towards the right.** The Republican Party is currently an 'extreme conservative force' in America. Obama, on the other hand, is providing his liberal base with very little: his continuing support for offshore drilling, and various constitutional protections have weakened it considerably. And now, if her scant record is anything to go by, Obama's nomination of Elena Kagan to the US Supreme Court will only help to move the court further to the Right. ■

Alexander Cockburn was speaking with Nikita Kurkin and Julia Netesova