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As part of its coverage of the U.S. presidential election, The International Herald Tribune invited commentators and opinion leaders from around the world to share their first reaction upon learning that Barack Obama had won and whether his election will help America's image in the world? A complete list of responses is available at www.iht.com

The "Obama Effect" At Home and Abroad

By Stanley A. Weiss

For me, Obama's victory is a source of both inspiration and concern.

For Americans like me, it's inspiring—something I thought I'd never see. Growing up in segregated Philadelphia during the Depression, I rarely saw a black person. Serving in the segregated U.S. Army during the Second World War, I never encountered the many black soldiers in uniform. In Chicago during the 1968 Democratic convention, I saw Americans divided by politics and race battle in the streets.

The "Obama Effect" alone won't end America's racial, social and cultural divisions. But it will help. He's not only the first African American to win the presidency; he'll be the first president in modern U.S. history not shaped by either World War II or Vietnam. He represents, as Colin Powell said, "a new generation coming into the world."

As a businessman, though, I'm concerned. With control of the White House and large majorities in Congress, Democrats will now pursue long-sought legislation—including higher taxes on capital gains and corporate income and making it easier for workers to unionize—which could put U.S. companies at a competitive disadvantage and cause them to flee (along with American jobs) for more business-friendly shores.

The great question now is will President Obama be a Franklin Roosevelt, quickly pushing through a populist agenda? Or a Jimmy Carter, often unable to

control leaders of his own party in Congress? Or a first-term Bill Clinton, whose overreaching on health care set the stage for a Republican comeback in Congress two years later?

Will Obama's election help America's image in the world?

If recent polls are to be believed, Obama's election will—at least in the short term—be a boost to America's flagging global image. The real question is whether he'll be able to harness this "Obama Effect" to serve U.S. interests over the long-term.

As I found earlier this year when I surveyed nearly 100 global opinion leaders—parliamentarians, diplomats, business leaders, military officials, journalists all non-Americans, on the advice they'd give the next president—improving America's image over the long-term requires changing policies, not just the president.

Will President Obama truly listen to allies, compared to Bush's with-us-or-against-us lecturing? Does he fulfill his pledge to withdraw U.S. forces from Iraq? Does he keep his promise to close Guantánamo Bay and ban torture? Does the U.S. show leadership on climate change and renewable energies? Does he signal that a post-9/11 America once again welcomes foreigners, not fears them?

"By making some moves in these areas," a former Indian diplomat said in my survey, "the next American president could electrify the world."

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