

Obama promises break with Bush

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As he prepared America to face up to the extraordinary challenges at home, U.S. President Barack Hussein Obama warned the rest of the world not to underestimate American power and purpose. Rejecting the proposition that "America's decline is inevitable" amidst the economic crisis that engulfs it today, Obama declared that the U S is ready to lead the world again. "To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict, or blame their society's ills on the West – know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy", Obama said. On the two wars that his predecessor George W Bush had locked America into, Obama said, "We will begin to responsibly leave Iraq to its people, and forge a hard-earned peace in Afghanistan". Reports from Washington suggest that Obama plans to move quickly to take charge of America's foreign and security policies.

He is expected to meet with the senior leadership of the American armed forces to review the direction of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Obama also left no one in doubt about his commitment to pursue the war on terror that Bush had launched after 9/11. At the same time, Obama signalled that his way of fighting terror might be fundamentally different from that of his predecessor. In a bow to the near universal criticism of the Bush foreign policies, Obama promised both restraint and resolve in the conduct of American policy in the coming years. Promising to depart from the unilateralist policies of the Bush Administration, Obama argued that "our power alone cannot protect us, nor does it entitle us to do as we please." "Our security" Obama insisted, "emanates from the justness of our cause, the force of our example, the tempering qualities of humility and restraint". There is no mistaking the new emphasis away from the widely perceived American arrogance of power in the Bush years and the new preference for multilateralism and international cooperation. Unlike Bush, Obama has not made promotion of democracy a major theme of his foreign policy. Four years ago, Bush had declared that "the survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world." Although many liberal Democrats would want an activist policy on democracy promotion, Obama has every reason to be cautious after Bush's debacle in trying to spread the gospel in the Muslim world. Obama avoided any reference to the Arab-Israeli conflict or the future of America's relations with Russia and China. But those details are likely emerge, once Obama's key national security decision-makers are confirmed in the next few days.

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