

Obama doctrine hinges on economy

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Barack Obama yesterday issued formal burial rites for the George W. Bush neoconservative era with the release of his first national security strategy, which calls for a "renewal of American leadership" by working with other countries and reinvigorating the US economy.

The four-yearly review, which is Mr Obama's first chance to create an "Obama doctrine" summarising his approach to the world, says that the key to America's future security will hinge on its ability to reinvent its rusting domestic economy.

In contrast to Mr Bush's controversial first national security strategy (NSS) in 2002, which issued an aggressive call to prolong the US's hegemony even by undertaking pre-emptive wars, Mr Obama's first take brings the US back to more traditional ways of conducting foreign policy.

Perhaps the biggest difference with the Bush era is in its emphasis on economic renewal.

The 60-page document listed education, energy, science and fiscal discipline as Mr Obama's leading domestic economic priorities. "Our prosperity serves as a wellspring for our power," it says. "Even as we have maintained our military advantage, our competitiveness has been set back in recent years."

Again, in contrast to the Bush documents, which brushed aside the multilateral system, Mr Obama's NSS calls for a refurbished United Nations. But it says the US should also build ad hoc partnerships with rising powers such as China, India, Russia and Brazil to tackle the increasing number of cross-border problems. Likewise, the document emphasises that the US will continue to fight a war "against a far-reaching network of hatred". But it drops reference to Mr Bush's "global war on terror".

The document reaffirms support for democracy and human rights around the world. But it avoids any hint of imposing elections at gunpoint. It also emphasises the need to restore American values by banning torture and restoring legal rights to terrorist detainees.

"The United States rejects the false choice between the narrow pursuit of our interests and an endless campaign to promote our values," it says.

Most national security analysts welcomed the document but cautioned against reading it as a detailed roadmap for how the Obama administration would handle the problems it set out. "Taken at face value this is a return to the more classic American foreign policy of engagement and partnership - with a few changes it could have been written by the Eisenhower administration," said Anthony Cordesman at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies. "But it isn't really a strategy, more a statement of intent."

Other analysts said the document failed to offer a vision for foreign policy, or link up a way of achieving the wish list that it presents. "The White House could have saved the paper by downloading a picture of George Bush and putting a red circle around him with a line through it," says David Rothkopf, who has written a book on the national security council. "It is really a to do list without setting out how it will achieve what is on the list."

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