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## So far so good - but now for the hard part

Daniel Flitton  
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*"There are many who won't agree with every decision or policy I make as president ... but I will always be honest with you about the challenges we face. I will listen to you - especially when we disagree."*

WILL Barack Obama be as frank in four years when the next election rolls around? Can Americans keep the faith that has delivered him to the White House? And for those of us watching on, fascinated, how will the rest of the world come to regard the first black man to occupy the Oval Office?

It may seem unfair to lump the pressure of the unknown future on the shoulders of the president-elect, mere hours after he achieved what is, by any standard, an incredible feat.

He bested two giants of politics - John McCain, his Republican rival, and Hillary Clinton, until this year the putative heir to the Democratic mantle.

He traversed the country, made countless speeches and raised a treasure chest like none before. He faced down every trick and surprise from his opponents in a country where politics can seem a blood-sport, ran a firm campaign and inspired millions of new voters.

Yet the astounding truth is that winning was the easy part. As Senator Obama told the Democratic faithful gathered in a Chicago park to hear his acceptance speech, "this victory alone is not the change we seek - it is only the chance for us to make that change".

Chief among the challenges is rebuilding US standing in the world. All the big issues - terrorism, nuclear weapons, climate change and the rest - and every decision Senator Obama makes will be judged globally.

George Bush has squandered America's stocks abroad. But the mirror opposite of this international resentment is found in the person of Senator Obama. His rise has been watched abroad almost as closely as at home, and expectations for change are extraordinarily high.

So too, are the risks of disappointment.

Brendon O'Connor, an Australian scholar with the Woodrow Wilson Centre in Washington DC, has enjoyed a ringside seat to the final extraordinary weeks of this 21-month campaign.

"I think he will have a honeymoon period, definitely," says Dr O'Connor.

A specialist in the study of "anti-Americanism", Dr O'Connor believes the phenomenon will subside. "It will move global public opinion, certainly in the first year of his administration, quite significantly," he says.

More than 200,000 people turned out in Germany to hear Senator Obama speak this year and Dr O'Connor interprets a "shallow" depth to resentment in places such as France.

Many relatively simple measures will help Senator Obama win trust. Closing down the prison at Guantanamo Bay is one, bringing a fresh approach to global warming another.

But Dr O'Connor accepts that Senator Obama will have to show sceptics substance beyond his homilies of change.

"It's probably those that have a very unfavourable view that are harder to move," he says.

Iraq and Afghanistan are key tests, both long wars that have drained international patience.

"What anyone can achieve, given the hand he's been dealt in both of those countries, that really will be fascinating, but also I think it would be unfair to have wildly optimistic expectations," says Dr O'Connor.

A challenge with enormous global implications is the economic meltdown. "Job No. 1 is the economy," says Michael Parks, a former *Los Angeles Times* editor and now visiting scholar with the US Studies Centre in Sydney.

The rapid advent of the economic crisis is also a wider reminder that much of the agenda for an Obama presidency is still to be determined.

### OBAMA'S INBOX

#### Fixing the economy

HOUSE prices plunging and a credit crunch. Obama will need a crack team to fix this mess. The US economy is bound to the world's - China has an estimated \$US3 trillion invested in US currency bonds. How Obama deals with Beijing will be interesting.

**Iraq**EXTRACTING US troops without tipping Iraq back into conflict will be tough - and al-Qaeda leaders will trumpet withdrawal as a victory. But it is also clear Iraqis want the Americans out - it's a good bet neighbour Iran does too.

**Afghanistan**OBAMA has promised to push hard against the Taliban, and is calling on the rest of the world for more troops. The war has spilled into Pakistan, and Obama might be disappointed by a lukewarm response.

**Environment and energy**THE US has a long way to go to catch up on global warming. The question is linked to energy - and Americans are the biggest users. Obama has a chance to use international goodwill to shape the international debate on combating climate change. Some countries may resent the new US activism.

#### Trust in America

GEORGE Bush plumbed the depths of global resentment and Obama is seen as the antidote. But capitalising on America's "soft power" - the appeal of its culture and values - will take more than a few inspiring speeches.

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/world/us-election-2008/so-far-so-good--but-now-for-the-hard-part-20081105-5iiv.html>

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