

# Advice for Obama

GERMANY

## Too Much Hope

BY JOSEF JOFFE

**F**OR BARACK OBAMA, THE GOOD NEWS is also bad news: if he ran in Germany today, he would win by a landslide, with 67 percent of the vote. Why is this bad news? Because hell hath no fury like a nation disenchanted, to borrow from the old English play "The Mourning Bride."

Germany's Obamamania has disappointment written all over it, for two reasons. One is President George W. Bush. Somehow, the chattering class has decided that W is a cross between a demon and a dolt, a one-man Axis of Evil with a room-temperature IQ. Hence the derision and the contempt they direct at him; hence, also, a scapegoat fantasy that confuses the man with his country. Once we finally pack off Bush, so the wishful thinking goes, we will be able to love America again.

Alas, Germany's and Europe's problems with America run a lot deeper than that. W is just shorthand for overweening power; it's Mr. Big and not Mr. Bush that irks the European soul. It is power liberally used—and not, as in Iraq, always used with the say-so of the lesser players. It is America as a league of its own, a giant who will not reflexively submit to the dictates of goodness by which Europe (give or take Britain or France) now lives. At any rate, anti-Americanism is older than Bush, and it will outlive him. In fact, it will last as

long as the United States remains No. 1—the world's steamroller of might and modernity.

The second source of disillusionment will be Obama himself. Once inaugurated, the Savior & Redeemer will be president of the *über*-power that is the United States. He will be more multilateralist than was Bush in his first term, and he will speak more softly. But he will still carry the biggest stick on earth. Germans might want to read the foreign-policy chapter in Obama's book "Hoffnung wagen" ("The Audacity of Hope"). There are paragraphs in there that are pure Bush doctrine. On pre-emption: "We have the right to take unilateral military action to eliminate an imminent threat to our security." On American power: "There will be times when we must again play the role of the world's reluctant sheriff. This will not change—nor should it."

Obama can change the tune of U.S. foreign policy. But he can't get rid of the brass and the kettledrums, so when he visits, he might gently prepare Berlin for the dissonances to come. Such as when, for instance, the next president asks Berlin for more combat troops in Afghanistan, where the *Bundeswehr* would rather drill wells and build schools.

JOFFE is publisher-editor of *Die Zeit* in Hamburg. His latest book is "Überpower: The Imperial Temptation of America" (2006).