



People write congratulatory messages to President-elect Barack Obama on a 24-foot long message board in front of the Lincoln Memorial November 7, 2008 in Washington, DC. The organization Avaaz.org has set up a global message board at the memorial with display of messages from all around the world for people to write their notes to Obama.

No hidden white bias seen in election

AP, Washington

Whether whites supported Barack Obama or not, they don't seem to have been swayed by pollsters about it.

Obama's election triumph on Tuesday presented no evidence of the so-called Bradley effect, in which whites who oppose a black politician mislead pollsters about whom they will vote for. Instead, national and state pre-election polls were generally accurate in reflecting voters' preferences in the presidential contest.

"I certainly hope this drives a stake through the heart of that demon," Charles Franklin, a University of Wisconsin political scientist and polling authority, said of the Bradley effect.

The phenomenon is named after former Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley, an African-American who in 1982 lost the race for California governor after leading in the polls. There were similar contests over the following decade in which black candidates facing white opponents had comfortable leads in polls, only to lose or narrowly win the elections.

Critics have said such turnabouts might have been largely the product of poor polling. Others have concluded that some whites, nervous about appearing to harbour anti-black feelings, in fact misled pollsters up through the early 1990s but that such behaviour faded over time.

Obama, who will become the

Arabs see hope in Obama after years of Bush

AP, Cairo

An Arab news network blared US election coverage in a Cairo hair salon, and the barbers and beauticians watched the images of Barack Obama's victory in amazement.

Then it cut to scenes from the latest Israeli-Palestinian violence and the funeral of Gaza fighters.

"Look, do you see that? That will end! It will get better!" blurted Ayman al-Sawi, caught up in the Obama enthusiasm.

Others in the shop sneered. All

American presidents are the same: Pro-Israel, one man said. But al-Sawi stood his ground.

"It won't be perfect, but Obama will be kinder," insisted the owner of a nearby electronics shop, who was hanging out in the salon on a customer-less Wednesday morning. "Look, I know America will always put Israel first, I'm not naive... But at least with Obama, I feel he will throw us a bone."

Almost despite themselves, many Arabs are daring to hope Obama will bring something new to the Middle East, where bitterness toward the US is probably the highest in the world.

Part of the optimism is simple joy at the imminent end of the Bush administration. Few figures are more disliked among the Mideast public than President Bush.

Over past years, the bloodshed in Iraq, fears of war with Iran, abuse at Abu Ghraib and prisoners at Guantanamo convinced many that the United States was an anti-Arab, anti-Muslim bully. A feeling of despair and hopelessness became widespread and few believed US policies would ever change.

Bush admin deported record number of illegals last year

AP, Washington

The US government arrested and deported record numbers of illegal immigrants nearly 350,000 in the past year, authorities say. It has also naturalized a record number of new Americans during the same time period, more than 1 million.

Bush administration officials consider these to be great accomplishments within a system that President-elect Obama calls "broken and overwhelmed" on his transition Web site.

"We are seeing the kinds of results that the country hasn't seen for many years," Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff said last month.

When Congress failed to pass comprehensive immigration reform in 2007, the administration kicked up its enforcement of the immigration laws already on the books. The government also hired more people to process applications for immigrants who want to enter the country legally.

These enhancements led to increases in arrests of illegal immigrants and employers who hire them; decreases in the amount of time it takes to process immigration applications; it now takes 9-10 months for naturalization applications, compared with 16-18 months before that. US Citizenship and Immigration Services has reduced its backlog to 1.1 million, which is down from its

Bush leaves ME peace puzzle for Obama

AP, Jerusalem

The Bush administration has conceded that an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal is no longer possible by the end of its term and is preparing to hand the fragile, unfinished US-backed peace effort to President-elect Obama.

Obama may not want it, at least as designed by the Republican Bush administration, seen as slow to embrace the role of honest Mideast broker. Many of Obama's foreign policy advisers were players in the Clinton administration's extensive Mideast peace efforts and are unenthusiastic about President Bush's hands-off approach.

After months of publicly insisting that an agreement still could be sealed by the year-end deadline set by the two sides and Bush last November in Annapolis, Md., US officials said Thursday for the first time it would have to wait.

"We do not think it is likely it will happen before the end of the year," White House spokeswoman Dana Perino said in Washington after Secretary of State Condoleezza

Rice acknowledged as much at the start of a Mideast trip.

Bush has employed Rice as a goad and monitor, but not a central negotiator. The administration said that to be viable, any deal should come from the Israelis and Palestinians themselves. Rice's eighth visit to the region since the Annapolis peace conference had been intended as a push for urgent progress on the modest gains from a year of US-sponsored talks between Israel and one part of the Palestinian leadership.

Instead, amid political uncertainty in Israel, where a corruption scandal is forcing Prime Minister Ehud Olmert from office, the administration is focused on keeping the two sides from backsiding. Rice wants them to produce a placeholder affirmation of their commitment to the peace process.

She said it remained an "open question" as to what form the affirmation would take, but said it was critical for the incoming Obama administration, as well as a new Israeli government to be elected in February, to inherit a

solid framework to restart negotiations quickly.

"It should be carried forward," she said, stressing that progress, if not a full-on deal, had been achieved since Annapolis, including the fact that the two sides were talking again after years of Palestinian rebellion and international efforts to support the Palestinian people.

She added that she hoped the Israeli and Palestinians would "affirm that the Annapolis process and the framework it establishes is indeed the basis on which they believe they can come to a resolution of their conflict, regardless of anyone's timetables." It will be important to wrap up all of the work one way or another," she said.

Negotiators from the two sides were to brief top officials from the international diplomatic "quartet" on the Middle East: the United States, United Nations, European Union and Russia, in Egypt on Sunday on their progress to date.

But it was not clear whether that meeting, which Rice also will attend, would produce a document

or verbal statement that fits her bill, as Israel appears reluctant to put anything in writing that could memorialise specific results of the talks thus far.

"We hope that the current American administration will give the upcoming administration a positive opinion to continue this process, and bring it to a success," said Ahmed Qureia, the chief Palestinian negotiator.

Rice's comments at times took the tone of a concession speech and came at a news conference with Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, Israel's chief negotiator in the talks. At it, the two women spoke of the importance of keeping the talks alive.

"It is important that we preserve the process within the structure that we have created," said Livni, a centrist who will be running against hardline former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the Feb. 10 voting.

Netanyahu currently is favoured in most polls and has deep reservations about the peace process.

Obama receives greetings from world leaders

AP, Chicago

President-elect Obama accepted congratulations from nine presidents and prime ministers Thursday, returning calls from world leaders who reached out after his presidential victory.

The global financial crisis was among the topics Obama discussed with key US allies he'll deal with during his administration.

On the phone, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Japanese Prime Minister Tarō Asō, Mexican President Felipe Calderon, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown.

Sarkozy's office says they spoke for 30 minutes and characterized the discussion as "extremely warm" as the president congratulated Obama on a "brilliant" election victory. The statement said they discussed international issues, particularly the financial crisis, and agreed to meet in the "quite near future."

Harper's office said in a statement that they spoke about an international financial summit in Washington on Nov. 15 and its importance for addressing the global financial crisis. Obama had no plans to attend the meeting.

The prime minister's office says the two leaders emphasized that there could be no closer friends and allies than the United States

and Canada and vowed to maintain and further build upon the relationship. Harper's office called it a warm exchange and said they agreed to talk again soon.

Calderon's office said Obama pledged continued US support for Mexico's fight against organised crime and drug trafficking. A statement from the Mexican president's office says Obama told Calderon he was "conscious of the difficulty of the battle" and offered "decisive" US support.

Congress approved \$400 million in anti-drug aid for Mexico last



US President-elect Barack Obama leaves a gym on Thursday in Chicago, Illinois. US President George W Bush said Thursday he Obama would discuss major issues like global economic turmoil and the war in Iraq "early next week."



A woman carrying her baby and a mattress walks near Kibati, about 10km north of the provincial capital of Goma yesterday. Fresh fighting broke out Friday in eastern Congo, wreaking panic among civilians even as regional leaders gathered in Nairobi tried to rekindle dialogue and hammer out a roadmap to peace.

UN warns of Congo spillover as fighting erupts anew

AP, Nairobi

UN chief Ban Ki-moon urged African leaders gathered in Nairobi yesterday to stop the rot in eastern DR Congo or face a regional crisis, even as fresh fighting erupted and thousands were displaced.

Clashes broke out between Congolese troops and renegade general Laurent Nkunda's rebels around 15 kilometres (nine miles) from the regional capital Goma, the fourth consecutive day of violence after a brief ceasefire last week.

DR Congo President Joseph Kabila's spokesman accused UN peacekeepers of doing nothing to stop killings by rebels, following reports by Human Rights Watch that at least 20 civilians had been killed on Thursday.

"People are being slaughtered and MONUC did nothing," Kudara Kasongo said.

A senior Western official attending the summit admitted that "more should have been done" but said he remained confident that MONUC's Indian contingent could prevent Nkunda from capturing Goma.

The recent military offensives by the CNDP have radically compounded the situation, led to severe humanitarian consequences and thrust the eastern DRC once more into a phase of heightened crisis. This crisis could engulf the broader sub-region, Ban Ki-moon said.

The UN said Friday it estimated 250,000 people have been displaced in the region since September.

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