

WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 3441
January 6, 2012

Top Five Foreign Policy Moves in 2012

James Jay Carafano, Ph.D.

After three years of the Obama Doctrine, the place of the United States in the world is less secure than when the President came into office. That trend must change. Nor can foreign policy be left on the backburner any longer with Washington only focusing on domestic issues. The White House and Congress ought to make foreign policy a priority, and they ought to return to a policy where politics stops at the water's edge.

Rather than shaping foreign policies through the lens of election politics, Washington ought to protect the nation's interest first—even though that means admitting that right now the government is doing things more wrong than right and that fixing foreign policy in 2012 requires some bold moves. Here are the top five steps Washington could take.

1. End the Middle East Policy Muddle. A more robust policy needs to start with Iran. The strongest possible sanctions are important but not enough. The U.S. should more aggressively pursue a strategy to bring freedom to the people of Iran. In the long run, a free Iran is the best hope for peace and security in the volatile Middle East. Washington should make it clear that it stands with the Iranian people, not with the repressive regime of the ayatollahs.

Meanwhile, the political instability that has swept the Arab Middle East in recent months has underscored the fact that Israel is America's only reliable ally in the region. The Administration should rethink its Middle East priorities to enhance strate-

gic cooperation and improve bilateral relations with the Middle East's only genuine democracy.

Finally, a strong U.S. military presence in the region is essential. The premature withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq in particular was a massive strategic blunder. The U.S. should negotiate a rotating presence of forces that will serve to bolster the continuing stability of the country.

2. Stop the Race to Failure in Afghanistan. The Administration seems bent on a premature exit of U.S. forces from Afghanistan—before having fully implemented an effective counterinsurgency strategy—matched with a faux-peace process with the Taliban. This strategy is a prescription for disaster that will likely result in a resurgence of civil war in Afghanistan and the expansion of safe haven in Pakistan. Conditions in that part of the world could soon revert to how they were on September 10, 2001.

The Administration needs to suspend troop withdrawals and abandon any peace talks that do not require the Taliban to disarm, disavow terrorism, and reintegrate into Afghan society.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
<http://report.heritage.org/wm3441>

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison
Center for Foreign Policy Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

3. Reset the Reset with Russia. The Administration has nothing to show for its policy of resetting relations with Moscow—other than a country further slipping away from democracy with mounting human rights abuses and increasingly adopting policies in opposition to the United States. Russia also has problems within its own borders, including a growing Islamist insurgency in the South Caucasus that could spill over and affect U.S. interests.

It is time to stop treating Moscow like a favored stepchild. The Obama strategic arms engagement with Russia, which is allowing the U.S. arsenal to atrophy while the Russians expand and modernize, needs to be put on hold. The U.S. should speak out more forcefully on human rights and election abuses. The White House needs to start holding Moscow accountable to its anti-U.S. statements, propaganda, and policies.

4. Build Bilateral Alliances in Asia. The White House talks a good game about shifting its focus to Asia, but it still treads lightly on China's growing shadow. The Administration has been far too timid in advancing stronger relations with key nations like India and making real, serious commitments like selling advanced F-16 fighter aircraft to Taiwan. Following through on the promised arms sale to Taiwan ought to be step one—a signal that the U.S. is truly serious about supporting its friends and allies in Asia. There need to be real teeth in U.S. commitments.

5. Get a Serious Free Trade Agenda. Now that, after three years of dithering, the Administration finally secured the free trade agreements with Colombia, Panama, and South Korea, it is time to get on the ball and pursue other trade and investment agreements. For example, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (United States, Australia, Brunei, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam) could become a real game-changer in international trade by including Japan. But to bring Japan firmly on board and get a real, timely, first-rate, trade liberalizing agreement is going to take political commitment at the very top.

Obama Doctrine's Toll. Washington could do a lot in the next 12 months to make up the ground lost under the Obama Doctrine over the past three years. However, the White House needs to rethink some of the fundamental choices it has made. Congress should encourage the White House to do that and speedily move toward a more effective foreign policy.

—James Jay Carafano, Ph.D., is Deputy Director of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies and Director of the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a division of the Davis Institute, at The Heritage Foundation.