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Top Five Foreign Policy Priorities for 2014

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The United States faces mounting challenges abroad in 2014. With weak leadership from the White House over the past five years, the U.S. has been confronted and all too often sidelined by America's adversaries and strategic competitors. The Obama Administration's "leading from behind" strategy has been a spectacular failure that has led to confusion among traditional U.S. allies while emboldening the enemies of freedom.

In 2014, the U.S. should be willing to stand up to those who threaten its interests while it stands with those who share its values and goals. Foremost among those values are the principles of sovereignty and self-determination, which must be as central to U.S. foreign policy as they are sacred to its system of government. Here are the top five foreign policy priorities for the Administration and Congress in 2014.

1. Halt the Rise of a Nuclear-Armed Iran.

In 2014, Washington should strengthen, not weaken, sanctions against Tehran while deploying a comprehensive missile defense system to defend the U.S. and key allies from the growing Iranian threat.

The U.S. should advance a long-term goal of regime change in Iran, coupled with forceful condemnation of human rights violations by the Islamist tyranny. The flawed deal between the P5+1 group of powers (the U.S., Great Britain, France, Russia, China, and Germany) and Iran sends the wrong signal to Iran and has been rightly described by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as a "historic mistake."¹

Tehran remains the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism and continues to build its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. As a bipartisan group of Senators recently declared, a "nuclear weapons capable Iran presents a grave threat to the national security interest of the United States and its allies."²

2. Defend U.S. Sovereignty and Reform the Treaty Process.

The Administration backs a series of treaties—such as the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the U.N. Arms Trade Treaty, and the Law of the Sea Treaty—that would do nothing to advance U.S. national interests but would be detrimental to U.S. sovereignty by subjecting the U.S. to the unprincipled and deeply political judgment of foreign sources of authority. The Senate has so far refused to give its consent to ratification for any of these treaties, and it should continue to show good judgment in 2014.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at
<http://report.heritage.org/ib4123>

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More broadly, these treaties illustrate the defects of the entire U.S. treaty system. Some have been formally rejected by the Senate. Others have been in the Senate’s “inbox” for decades. Still others are opposed by a clear majority of Senators. Yet all of them, by virtue of the fact that they have been signed by the President, are held to bind the U.S. not to violate their “object and purpose.”

The U.S. should reform its treaty system to make it clear that only treaties that have been signed by the President, received the advice and consent of the Senate, and been the subject of any necessary implementing legislation should be binding upon the U.S.

3. Bolster Allies and Economic Freedom in the Middle East.

While the Obama Administration has rushed to engage adversaries such as Iran and Syria, longtime allies such as Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia have chafed at what they regard as Washington’s neglect of their core security interests. The U.S. should reassure its allies that it will not sacrifice their security interests for an illusory nuclear deal with Iran, press them to accept a diplomatic solution in Syria that preserves the Assad regime, or force them to accept half-baked deals with terrorists. It should also step up counterterrorism cooperation with allies and sub-state actors to defeat al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, and other terrorist groups.

The bloody “Arab Spring” in Egypt, Libya, and Syria has shown that countries wracked by popular revolts are extremely difficult to transform into stable democracies. In the absence of strong and supportive civil societies, trustworthy institutions, and a large middle class, political parties are likely to proclaim themselves to be democrats only to revert to authoritarian rule after “one man, one vote, one time.”

Rather than rushing to midwife stillborn instant democracies, Washington should put a higher priority on supporting freedom, particularly economic freedom. Bolstering economic freedom can help fuel economic growth, create jobs for disillusioned youths who would otherwise be potential recruits for radical movements, and gradually build larger and more influential middle classes, which are building blocks for stable democracies.

4. Weaken the European Project and Strengthen the Transatlantic Alliance.

A robust transatlantic alliance remains crucial to U.S. strategic interests, as the ongoing NATO-led operation in Afghanistan continues to demonstrate. At the heart of the NATO alliance, the Anglo-American Special Relationship—Washington’s most important bilateral partnership—is vital. In marked contrast, the European Project, or the process of “ever-closer union” in Europe, is weakening transatlantic ties while undermining economic freedom and prosperity in Europe. The U.S. needs to recognize that support for European integration is no longer in its interests or those of the nations of Europe.

As public disillusionment mounts across the European Union, Washington should support the principles of self-determination and economic liberty in Europe while taking a strong stand against the development of a European Union defense identity. A Europe of independent nation-states would best advance U.S. interests in Europe, a strong and enduring transatlantic alliance, and democracy inside Europe.

Washington should be cautious about the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, which could well lead to increased regulation and the importation of the EU’s managed market into the U.S. A transatlantic agreement that does not empower consumers

1. David Simpson and Josh Levs, “Israeli PM Netanyahu: Iran Nuclear Deal ‘Historic Mistake,’” CNN.com, November 25, 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/11/24/world/meast/iran-israel/> (accessed January 9, 2014).

2. Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, “Bipartisan Statement on Iran Sanctions,” November 21, 2013, <http://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/ranking/release/bipartisan-statement-on-iran-sanctions> (accessed January 9, 2014).

and open market opportunities for entrepreneurs would be a bad deal for everyone, especially the U.S.³

5. Reprioritize Relations with Key Asian Democracies.

The Administration's rhetoric about a U.S. "pivot" to Asia has been the worst of all worlds. Widely accepted as reality abroad, it has disillusioned American allies, but since it has not been backed up by any policy changes, it is nothing more than words. China's aggressive moves have led to nervousness in many Asian nations that are traditionally close to the U.S., but the U.S. has failed to demonstrate steadfast leadership in response.

The U.S. should re-emphasize the value of its relationships with close allies such as Japan and South Korea. But what is equally disheartening is the way that U.S. relations with India have stagnated. The faults are not all on the U.S. side, but the U.S. has too much at stake in its relations with India not to continually, but quietly, make

it clear that it prioritizes increasing pragmatic U.S.-Indian cooperation in economic, security, political, and cultural realms.

The World Needs Robust U.S. leadership. The year 2013 was marked by declining U.S. leadership and a series of foreign policy follies, from the White House's woeful handling of the Syria crisis and the illusory nuclear deal with Tehran to Washington's ill-judged support for the short-lived Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt.

The U.S. cannot afford to make similar mistakes in 2014. Washington should be willing to confront rogue regimes, protect U.S. sovereignty, strengthen its defenses at home and abroad, shore up traditional alliances, and actively side with those who are fighting for the right to shape their own destiny.

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3. See Ted R. Bromund, Rea S. Hederman, Bryan Riley, and Luke Coffey, "Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP): Pitfalls and Promises," *Heritage Foundation Issue Brief* No. 4100, December 5, 2013, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/12/transatlantic-trade-and-investment-partnership-ttip-pitfalls-and-promises>.