

The Foreign Policy Agenda Romney Could (and Should) Have

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Ted Galen Carpenter [uses](#) Romney's upcoming overseas trip to articulate what Republican foreign policy ought to look like:

In his speech to the VFW, Romney should outline a new security strategy built on the foundation of cautious, national-interest realism—a position that once characterized the GOP and still finds some resonance among the party's rank and file.

Carpenter identifies four issues where Romney could break with neoconservatives and hawks in the GOP that would be to his political advantage while also being an improvement over current policy: 1) “a prompt withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan, even faster than the Obama administration’s alleged commitment to have U.S. forces out of that country in 2014”; 2) “a repudiation of nation building as a U.S. foreign policy goal”; 3) “a complete reassessment of Washington’s overgrown network of formal and informal security commitments around the world”; 4) “a willingness to cut military spending.” These are all good proposals, and they form the beginning of what any foreign policy of restraint would require.

Andrew Bacevich outlined the core ideas informing a foreign policy of restraint in the concluding chapter of [Washington Rules](#). First, Bacevich addresses the role of the U.S. and its military in the world:

First, the purpose of the U.S. military is not to combat evil or to remake the world, but to defend the United States and its most vital interests. However necessary, military power itself is neither good nor inherently desirable. Any nation defining itself in terms of military might is well down the road to perdition, as earlier generations of Americans instinctively understood. As for military supremacy, the lessons of the past are quite clear. It is an illusion and its pursuit an invitation to mischief, if not disaster. Therefore, the United States should maintain only those forces required to accomplish the defense establishment's core mission.

The practical implications of this are clear: significantly reduced military spending, a dramatically reduced overseas U.S. military presence, and a focus on *national defense* rather than endless exercises in power projection on the other side of the planet. That means recognizing that most conflicts around the world do not affect U.S. vital interests, and it requires that we cease inflating the national interest to include virtually anything and everything in the world.

The second principle is closely related to the first:

Second, the primary duty station of the American soldier is in America. Just as the U.S. military should not be a global police force, so too it should not be a global occupation force. Specific circumstances may from time to time require the United States on a temporary basis to establish a military presence abroad. Yet rather than defining the norm, Americans should view this prospect as a sharp departure, entailing public debate and prior congressional authorization....Priority should be given to those regions where the American presence costs the most while accomplishing the least. According to those criteria, U.S. troops should withdraw from the Persian Gulf and Central Asia forthwith.

Finally, the use of force needs to be limited to self-defense:

Third, consistent with the Just War tradition, the United States should employ force only as a last resort and only in self-defense. The Bush Doctrine of preventive war—the United States bestowing on itself the exclusive prerogative of employing force against ostensible threats even before they materialize—is a moral and strategic abomination, the very inverse of prudent and enlightened statecraft....Never again should the United States undertake “a war of choice” informed by fantasies that violence provides a shortcut to resolving history’s complexities.

This would not only rule out large-scale “preventive” wars of invasion, but it would also require that U.S. avoid the “preventive” use of air power. This is the foreign policy vision that the Republican Party could and should have, and it is the one that will be the best for the health of our constitutional system and American interests.