



[Skewed Foreign Policy \(II\)](#) Daniel Larison November 18th, 2011

Andrew [responds](#) to my [earlier post](#) on [Obama and neoconservatives](#):

*But on the core question of advancing our national interests in the Middle East by insisting on a settlement in Israel-Palestine, Obama is trying very hard against an implacable and fanatical opposition of evangelical end-timers and neocon neurotics. And Romney, in contrast, wants to go to war with Iran, do whatever Israel says, and increase offense spending. I call it offense because I see no way that putting a base in Australia somehow defends the homeland of the United States. It does nothing of the kind. It just projects global power.*

In fairness to Obama, he plainly [admitted](#) that this is what the U.S. is doing in the western Pacific when he said that the U.S. will “project power and deter threats to peace.” Naturally, I agree with Andrew that this has nothing to do with defending the United States, and Justin Logan is right to observe that the “pivot” to Asia will encourage East Asian allies to become even [greater free-riders](#) than they already are. However, the first thing to understand about this is that this is the direction the administration wanted to take from the beginning. Administration policy towards Asia was expressed in the slogan, “America is back,” which prompted some critics to note that America had never “gone” anywhere, but it made clear that they wanted the U.S. role in the western Pacific to increase. This has informed their mishandling of the basing dispute with Japan, and it has been driving the push to check Chinese ambitions in the South China Sea.

Andrew asks, “Why shouldn’t China have a sphere of influence in the Pacific?” That’s a good question. Why indeed? Because apparently no regional power is permitted to have a sphere of influence in its own region, but the U.S. insists on having spheres of influence in every region. It doesn’t seem to bother very many people that this is fundamentally destabilizing and a recipe for making wider international conflict more likely. The assertion that the U.S. is a “Pacific nation” sounds somewhat reasonable until one realizes that Obama and Clinton are referring to a U.S. role in the western Pacific, at which point it becomes no less ridiculous than the continuing insistence that America must be a “European power” twenty years after the USSR ceased to exist.

Romney’s ship-building enthusiasm and anti-China rhetoric are more aggressive and confrontational than what Obama is doing, but not that much more. On Israel and Palestine, it is marginally better that the hard-liners are out of power blocking presidential

efforts to reach a settlement instead of being the ones making policy, and I shudder to think what the Russia policy of a Romney administration would look like. Obama has never challenged “neo-imperial assumptions” because he shares them. Provided that we understand this, and so long as there are no illusions about what a second Obama term will bring in terms of continued hegemonism and overstretch, I have no problem accepting that Romney would clearly be even worse.