



U.S. closer to conflicts under Obama watch

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The tenure of President Obama — who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize just months into his presidency — is winding down amid widening instability in the Middle East and growing threats by other powers — including Iran, Russia and China — to the U.S. and its allies.

But foreign policy experts disagree on how much of the blame for the U.S. being drawn closer to war in multiple regions of the world — while still fighting the wars Obama inherited — lies with Obama's foreign policy decisions.

Obama campaigned to “end the war in Iraq responsibly, finish the fight against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, secure nuclear weapons and loose nuclear materials from terrorists and renew American diplomacy to support strong alliances,” according to the campaign website.

Instead, “the world has gone to hell in a hand basket” under Obama's watch, said Thomas Donnelly, co-director of the Marilyn Ware Center for Security Studies at the American Enterprise Institute.

“What can we call what we are doing in Iraq and Syria other than ineffective?” Donnelly said, noting that U.S. policies have also emboldened adversaries like Russia, North Korea and Iran. He said he fears their growing influence in the Middle East, the former Eastern Bloc and the Far East could ultimately lead the United States into war.

The withdrawal of troops from Iraq lead to the rise of terror groups like ISIS as well as “the return of Russia to the Middle East and the emergence of Iran as the most likely hegemony,” Donnelly said.

But Christopher Preble, vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute, noted that the plan to withdraw troops from Iraq by 2011 was inherited from President George W. Bush.

On the issue of nuclear arms reduction, “Look at the way (Obama) pursued the nuclear deal with Iran,” Preble said. “It can be criticized for many things, but I think few people can dispute that it will reduce the likelihood that Iran will develop nuclear weapons for at least the next 12 to 15 years.”

Donnelly said the pact made Iran more dangerous.

“By granting Iran everything and more that it wanted from the nuclear program, it opened the door to Iran becoming far more influential in the region,” Donnelly said, noting that Israeli officials have turned from their U.S. ally and toward Saudi Arabia to seek help in thwarting the threat posed by Iran.

Preble said he is concerned about the U.S. creeping closer to involvement in a number of other conflicts under Obama’s watch.

“The U.S. sliding more directly into war in Yemen is particularly concerning for me right now,” Preble said of the increasing involvement of the U.S. in Yemen, on behalf of its ally Saudi Arabia despite the lack of U.S. interest implicated by that conflict.