



Grading Obama's Foreign Policy

Eight experts rate the president's performance so far.

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Ted Galen Carpenter:

President Obama has amassed a decidedly mixed record on foreign policy. He can boast of several worthwhile achievements during his first 3 years. He fulfilled the commitment to withdraw all U.S. forces from Iraq by the end of 2011, repaired much of the damage that the Bush administration had caused to America's relationship with the European democracies, and put the United States -- at least rhetorically -- on the right side of history regarding the Arab Awakening. His campaign to eliminate al Qaeda's leadership achieved numerous successes, most notably the killing of Osama Bin Laden. Relations with Russia, which had become quite tense during the Bush years, modestly improved.

Unfortunately, there were also major mistakes and disappointments. His worst blunder was the decision to expand the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan and intensify the futile nation-building mission in that pre-industrial, tribal society. Obama's policy toward Iran, despite an encouraging initial effort to establish a meaningful dialogue with Tehran, has resumed the same counterproductive, confrontational path of his predecessors. Tensions with Pakistan have risen sharply, as have tensions in America's most important relationship, with China. The Obama administration has also been slow to respond constructively to the mounting drug violence next door in Mexico, continuing instead to pursue a failed prohibitionist policy that enriches the drug cartels.

Finally, Obama has shown little inclination to adjust the overall U.S. security strategy to reflect America's increasingly precarious financial position. The president seems as willing as his predecessors to tolerate -- indeed, encourage -- U.S. allies to free-ride on Washington's security efforts. Even more disappointing, there has been little apparent recognition that U.S. power is

limited and that there is an urgent need to set priorities and prune less essential commitments. That is perhaps the biggest failure of Obama's foreign policy thus far.

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