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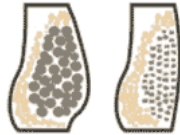
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Obama Foreign Policy Agenda Fraying at Home and Abroad

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By **David A. Patten**

President Barack Obama hoped to use the NATO summit in Lisbon, Portugal, to breathe new life into a foreign policy agenda that has sustained a substantial battering in a series of recent setbacks.

Hitting the "reset" button on his foreign policy won't come cheaply, however. Even if the president can win agreement to extend NATO's stay in Afghanistan to 2014, doing so figures to further alienate the president's increasingly anti-war base.



"I think a foreign policy in chaos, is how you would describe it," Helle Dale, a Heritage Foundation senior foreign policy analyst, tells Newsmax. "There were many people who bought into the Obama charisma that the mere presence of Barack Obama in the White House would change the world. And it hasn't.

"What you're seeing now," she adds, "is those dreams meeting the hard realities, which is to say that people around the world have their own interests, their own agendas, and they are not going to simply follow along."

That was already apparent in Lisbon on Saturday, where even allies couldn't agree on what exactly was agreed to on Afghanistan.

Obama said for the first time he wants U.S. troops out of major combat in Afghanistan by the end of 2014, the date he and other NATO leaders set for moving Afghans into the lead role in fighting the Taliban.

Allies had different interpretations of that target's meaning. Instead of merely shifting troops from a combat role, Britain wants their troops out by 2015 at the latest. Canada, meanwhile, is set to get out next year. While he faces a rebellion from his own liberal base in the United States, Obama is equally powerless abroad to muster the will among allies to work with the United States in Afghanistan and other hot spots.

The view that Obama's foreign policy is faltering appears to be the consensus among foreign policy experts in the nation's Capital.

"He's in serious trouble, as we know," Washington Times and UPI editor-at-large Arnaud de Borchgrave tells Newsmax.TV in an exclusive interview.

"The elections have suddenly put him at a disadvantage on all fronts.

"He's no longer the magician who did the famous Berlin talk when he was running for office and the Cairo speech last year," de Borchgrave tells Newsmax. "These were knockouts . . . He was winning one ballgame after another. Now he's losing one right after another."

De Borchgrave dismisses the idea that keeping U.S. troops in Afghanistan through 2014 will stabilize that country as "totally ludicrous."

The president's personal popularity remains strong in many foreign nations, just as it does in the United States. But his foreign policy initiatives have sustained a series of setbacks:

- The START arms-reduction treaty that Obama signed with the Russians is on life support because of Republican opposition in the lame-duck Congress. Although the

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deal can wait for the new Congress to ratify it, the odds that the new Congress would approve it appear even slimmer. Christopher A. Preble, foreign policy studies director at the CATO Institute, tells Newsmax that opposition to the treaty appears "purely political."

- The signature triumph expected from Obama's trip to the G-20, a trade agreement with South Korea, fell through. It was a reminder that nations tend to act on their perceived self interest, rather than strong personal appeals.
- European leaders and the Chinese have openly castigated the Obama administration for its loose fiscal and monetary policies, which make their goods less competitive.
- The president probably will win an Israeli agreement to a 90-day moratorium on East Bank settlements. But the price tag is a \$3 billion in F-35 fighter jets. That the United States must resort to an inducement to win a mere three month's of cooperation from Israel is provoking "chuckles" in Washington, according to de Borchgrave.
- Iran's mullahs continue to thumb their noses at the West over that nation's nuclear ambitions. Losing the START treaty would render Russia even less likely to cooperate in reining in Iran.

The irony, of course, is that President Obama hoped he could use his overseas visits to shift the political conversation away from the historic drubbing his party received in the midterms. Instead, pundits are pondering whether the midterms have undermined his credibility on the world stage.

Historically, presidents have relied on foreign policy accomplishments to offset the setbacks they sustain domestically. But for now Obama appears to be struggling in both arenas.

Preble attributes President Obama's difficulties to the "unrealistic expectations" that then-candidate Obama encouraged regarding America's ability to act as the world's policeman in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Preble tells Newsmax that the tripling of the U.S. troop presence since Obama took office amounts to a "gross misallocation of resources." Only a few hundred al-Qaida members thought to be still operating in Afghanistan, he says.

Preble, a retired Navy officer and author of three books, calls nation-building in Afghanistan a "fool's errand" — a mistake that precedes Obama, he points out. American credibility in international affairs is suffering as a result, he says.

"We've spent a trillion dollars in two fairly medium-sized cases," Preble tells Newsmax. "If a superpower isn't capable of winning a conflict decisively in either Afghanistan or Iraq, then I think it really calls into question the concept that the United States can be responsible for the security of the whole world.

"I think that's a misconception that many have bought into for a long time," he adds.

Dale believes there's still time for Obama to make a foreign-policy comeback. But she says he'll have to reverse his penchant for pressing forward on a multitude of fronts simultaneously.

"Choose a couple of priorities and stick with those," she says. "One of his weaknesses has been that he has prioritized everything. They have gotten involved in so many issues, and put so much at stake in so many areas, that they have not been able to carry the ball across the goal line in any of them.

"In order to achieve credibility," says Dale, "you have to show achievement and you have to focus. You cannot do everything. So I would think they have to rethink their foreign policy priorities, and stick with them."

However, Dale says she remains unconvinced President Obama has the ideological flexibility to make that adjustment.

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