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## How Tea Partiers Will Change Foreign Policy

By *MAX FISHER* | November 09, 2010 11:38am



Now that a number of Tea Party Republicans have won seats on Congress, political observers have paid close attention to how the newcomers will guide domestic policy, particularly on [government spending](#), whether they will roll back the defense budget, and how their [pledges to repeal all or part of health-care reform](#) will play out. But what effect will they have on foreign policy? As President Barack Obama seeks to continue to U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, to escalate in Afghanistan in time for the planned 2011 draw-down, to negotiate Israel-Palestinian peace and deter Iranian proliferation, to continue building ties with Russia and manage China's rise, how will the Tea Party congressional bloc influence America's place in the world?

- Will Be Driven by Individual GOP Personalities** The Washington Post's [Michael Gerson](#) writes, "Precisely because there is no clear Tea Party foreign policy ideology - Sen.-elect Rand Paul's isolationist tendencies could hardly be more different from Sen. Jim DeMint's internationalism - the enthusiasms of individual congressional leaders will play a large role. Obama's softening approach toward Cuba is unlikely to survive the elevation of Ileana Ros-Lehtinen as chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, particularly since Ros-Lehtinen once expressed her openness to Fidel Castro's assassination. Most Republicans will to defer to Sen. Jon Kyl's judgments on the New START nuclear reductions treaty with Russia. If the Russian conflict with Georgia flares, Sen. John McCain, a strong critic of Russian conduct, will have the lead."
- Tea Party Senators Pledge 'No' on Russian Missile Treaty** Foreign Policy's [Josh Rogin](#) reports, "If the Senate vote on the New START nuclear reduction treaty with Russia is postponed until next year, the new Tea Party-affiliated senators are likely to vote no." The START treaty, which Obama signed with Russian President Dmitri Medvedev, would pledge to jointly reduce the size of both nations' nuclear arsenals. "[Kentucky Republican Senator-elect Rand] Paul, who is a leader of the Tea Partiers though with more libertarian inclinations, added that the Tea Party has no real foreign policy, but that its members are likely to unify around core principles when they descend on Washington next week."
- Could Tea Partiers Oppose Afghan Build-Up?** The Wall Street Journal's [Nathan Hodge](#) writes, "At issue is whether candidates backed by tea-party activists may force a shift in the terms of debate over the war in Afghanistan. While Republicans are traditionally hawkish on defense—and foreign policy hasn't emerged as a major campaign issue—some GOP candidates have expressed skepticism about the scale of U.S. military involvement in the region." Ultimately, "Much will also depend on who gets key committee assignments."
- Will Continue Bush-Era Neoconservatism** Outside the Beltway's [Doug Mataconis](#) writes, "They might, with very few exceptions, simply become a rubber stamp for the neo-conservative foreign policy that seemed to become GOP policy during the Bush years. ... For the most part I suspect that

Palin, Bolton, and Liz Cheney will be successful in stamping out any talk of reconsidering the GOP gospel when it comes to foreign policy. That's unfortunate, because this is one area where real change is needed before it's too late."

- **A New Libertarian Era?** The CATO Institute's [Christopher Preble and John Samples](#) write in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, "It seems unlikely, however, that the same tea partiers who want the U.S. government to do less at home are anxious to do more everywhere else. For example, the movement and its new representatives in Washington might prefer to avoid sending U.S. forces into unnecessary and futile wars. Accordingly, they might also realize that substantial reductions in military spending are strategically wise, fiscally prudent, and politically necessary."

## Sources

- [Tea Party Foreign Policy](#) *Michael Gerson*, *The Washington Post*
- [Stirring Afghan Policy](#) *Nathan Hodge*, *The Wall Street Journal*
- [Opposing START](#) *Josh Rogin*, *Foreign Policy*
- [More Neocons](#) *Doug Mataconis*, *Outside the Beltway*
- [Going Libertarian](#) *Christopher Preble and John Samples*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*

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