

Romney's foreign policy stances disturbing

Joel Brinkley

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Now that [Mitt Romney](#) is certain to be the Republican nominee for president, it's time to examine his foreign-affairs policies and background.

In short, he has no significant foreign policy experience. None at all. And his policy pronouncements have been disturbing.

He called President [Obama](#) naive for announcing plans to pull troops out of Afghanistan. Well, Romney is the one who is naive, and that's the problem. Given all the dilemmas the United States faces worldwide, we don't need another president who figures out what to do through trial and error.

When Obama took office in 2009, he, too, was quite naive, though he had served on the [Senate Foreign Relations Committee](#). But almost as soon as he took office, Obama made a naive and damaging foreign-policy mistake.

He waded into the moribund Middle East peace process and pushed Israel to stop building West Bank settlements. Well, every president since [Jimmy Carter](#) has urged Israel to stop building settlements. Every president has failed. Why on earth did Obama believe his demand would be any more effective than any others had been in the past 35 years?

In fact, this time it did even more damage. Right away, [Mahmoud Abbas](#), the Palestinian leader, remarked: "When Obama came to power, he is the one who announced that settlement activity must be stopped. If America says it and Europe says it and the whole world says it, you want me not to say it?"

Still, to this very day, Abbas refuses to participate in peace talks as long as Israel continues building and expanding settlements. And just a few days ago, Israeli Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) threatened another large expansion of settlements. All of that certainly educated Obama. You might not agree with his foreign policies, but he hasn't made a similarly naive error since.

Enter Romney, who declared a couple of months ago that "Russia is America's No. 1 geopolitical foe." What nonsense. The U.S.-Russia relationship is a bit strained, but what about Iran, North Korea, Pakistan? Every one of those states poses a strategic threat that Russia does not.

"Immediately, speculations surfaced that the former governor of Massachusetts continues to live in a Cold War world and has few, if any, insights about American foreign policy," [Klaus Larres](#), a German American academic, wrote for the [American Institute for Contemporary German Studies](#). And former Russian President [Dmitry Medvedev](#) told Romney to use his head and "check the time. It's now 2012, not the mid-1970s."

His advice on Afghanistan has been no better. Repeatedly he has called the plan to gradually withdraw forces "misguided" and "an extraordinary admission of failure."

In the past, Romney has asserted that the United States and NATO need to defeat the [Taliban](#) before leaving. That has been the goal for nearly 11 years, and NATO is no closer today. The most recent National Intelligence Estimate asserts that the war is unwinnable as long as the Taliban maintains a safe haven in Pakistan and the Afghan government continues its corrupt, malevolent and counterproductive ways.

I wonder if Romney knows that one-third of the Western forces killed in Afghanistan so far this year died at the hands of Afghan soldiers they were training or leading.

In still another display of naivete, he has repeatedly said he would largely allow military commanders to determine policy toward Afghanistan. Doesn't he know that every military officer is taught from the first day in the service to believe that his mission is achievable, no matter what? Can you imagine a theater commander telling the president: "Sir, I can't achieve my mission. The war cannot be won. It's time to pull out"?

Today, Romney is relatively quiet on the subject of Afghanistan, probably realizing that the vast majority of Americans, even most Republicans, want to bring the troops home - now.

Throughout the Republican primaries, foreign affairs has not been a significant subject of debate. That's a shame. We face so many dilemmas. Syria, China, Venezuela - even Israel, where Romney has promised to allow his friend Netanyahu, the most destructive leader Israel has ever had, to make some decisions for him.

Pandering for Jewish and evangelical Christian votes, Romney said he wouldn't announce Middle East policy before asking Netanyahu: "What would you like me to do?"

[Doug Bandow](#), a former Reagan administration official writing in the [American Conservative](#) magazine last month, quoted other conservatives saying Obama is "strikingly vulnerable" in the foreign-affairs arena. But Bandow added: "So far, Romney is convincing only as a blowhard with a know-nothing foreign policy."

Romney on foreign policy

Mitt Romney, almost certainly the Republican presidential nominee for 2012, has made foreign policy pronouncements as he continues his bid for high office, but, says Joel Brinkley, he has nothing in the way of foreign policy experience.

-- Romney: "Russia is America's No. 1 geopolitical foe." Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, above, says Romney should use his head and "check the time"; it's no longer the Cold War of the 1970s.

-- Romney thinks U.S. military leaders should determine policy toward Afghanistan (led by President [Hamid Karzai](#), above). But most Americans want U.S. troops home, and Romney has grown quiet on the issue.

-- Casting wide for Jewish and

evangelical Christian votes, Romney said he wouldn't announce his policy on the Mideast until he had consulted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu (above).

© 2012 Joel Brinkley Joel Brinkley, a professor of journalism at Stanford University, is a Pulitzer Prize-winning former foreign correspondent for the New York Times. To comment, go to sfgate.com/chronicle/submissions/#1.