

Romney's Illogical Foreign Trip and Why He Feels Compelled To Go Abroad

Posted By [Daniel Larison](#) On July 6, 2012 @ 1:42 pm In | [No Comments](#)

Justin Logan [discusses](#) ^[1] the "political illogic" of [Romney's overseas trip](#) ^[2]:

There's also a danger that defending Romney's Poland-related policy preferences will allow Obama to go on offense. For example, Romney has made a mountain out of the molehill that is the New START treaty, which the Poles supported enthusiastically. So while the missile defense issue that Romney apparently wants to bring up could put him on the side of the Poles, Obama could just as easily point out how he shepherded through a treaty that the Poles support and Romney opposes.

I forgot to mention that in my [earlier post](#) ^[2], Romney's opposition to New START is a policy mistake, but it's also a political loser everywhere he's going to go in Europe. Every European government wanted the treaty ratified, and Poland's government was quite [vocal in supporting the treaty](#) ^[3]. Romney's standard line on New START (and Russia policy as a whole) is "we give, Russia gets," which isn't how Europeans see arms control negotiations and arms reduction treaties at all. Most Europeans do not see arms control as a zero-sum contest in which one state loses out to another. Meanwhile, Romney's position on missile defense will put him on the side of [a minority of Poles](#) ^[4].

Logan makes a fair point that Romney's decision to stay away from Afghanistan is smart:

Going there at all is a huge lose. It's a zero-sum tradeoff between saying things the public will like and saying things Kristol and his foreign-policy team will like. The public loathes the war, but the Kristol and the Romney foreign-policy staffers like it a lot. So if he went and said anything the public wants to hear — like that he wants America to leave soon — he'd get trashed in the media by his foreign-policy team again. And if he gave a sop to his foreign-policy team, the public would worry he's Bush redux. So they're smart to stay away from Kabul.

All of that seems right to me, which strengthens the argument that Romney shouldn't be going anywhere overseas during the campaign. That points to a more significant, unavoidable problem for Romney, which is that his foreign policy views put him on the wrong side of public opinion much of the time. Romney's pandering instincts put him in a bind. On the one hand, he should normally want to take positions that please most voters, but he is also obliged to keep pandering to national security hawks in his party to keep them from revolting against him before the election.

Romney's normal opportunism should dictate that he avoid foreign policy all together or say what voters want to hear, but he can't do that without provoking constant griping and complaining from his advisers and hawks outside the campaign. Romney seems to be planning on this expanded overseas trip to try to placate some of these hawks. He has to know that they are going to keep coming back with new complaints about Romney's "neglect" of their priorities. The fact that he feels compelled to waste so much time overseas to satisfy them is a sign of what we can reasonably expect from Romney's relationship with these hawks if he should somehow manage to win the election.

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URLs in this post:

[1] discusses: http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/07/06/the_political_illogic_of_romney_mounting_a_foreign_policy_offensive

[2] Romney's overseas trip: <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/larison/romneys->

europaean-vacaation/

[3] vocal in supporting the treaty: <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/time-to-ratify-new-start>

[4] a minority of Poles: http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/0909/But_the_Polish_public_likes_it.html

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