



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on October 10, 2011

## Romney's Foreign Policy: Bush/Obama Redux

Romney pledged to “devote [himself] to an American Century” in which “America has the strongest economy and the strongest military in the world.” Romney issued his rather [underwhelming economic plan](#) a month ago. His proposal to strengthen the military by spending more money on it and deploying it in ever more far-flung locales, not by reducing its responsibilities — and therefore its costs — to those befitting a constitutional republic, is little more reassuring. As Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas), one of Romney's rivals for the GOP nomination, has long pointed out, excessive military spending is one of the causes of our nation's economic woes. Like the Soviet Union in its dying days, Romney's America would continue to burden the economy with diktats from the central government while pursuing a military buildup — a combination guaranteed to bankrupt the nation.



For Romney, U.S. foreign policy consists of deploying the government's power so as “to shape events,” not “be shaped by” them. “It is only American power — conceived in the broadest terms — that can provide the foundation of an international system that ensures the security and prosperity of the United States and our friends and allies around the world,” he asserted. Thus, he said, under his administration “the United States will apply the full spectrum of hard and soft power to influence events before they erupt into conflict.” “If America is the undisputed leader of the world,” he added, “it reduces our need to police a more chaotic world.”

This assumes two things not in evidence. First is that the world needs and desires to be led. The whole experiment with freedom in the West, however, has been about devolving power so that individuals can go about their lives with as little state interference as possible. The United States itself is the result of a rebellion against what was then the dominant power in the world.

The second false assumption is that the United States has a “need to police” the world. In truth, the world can get along just fine without American interference, as it did for the first century or so of this country's existence (and for thousands of years before that). Furthermore, Washington's efforts to be the world's policeman have not exactly been rousing successes, from U.S. entry into World War I — which led directly to World War II — to the ongoing occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. A better suggestion is for the United States to “observe good faith and justice towards all nations ... [and] cultivate peace and harmony with all,” in the words of [George Washington](#).

Romney cited a number of perceived threats to American dominance: “Islamic fundamentalism”; the uncertain outcome of the Arab Spring; “failed and failing states”; the governments of Iran, North Korea,



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Venezuela, and Cuba; “rising nations with hidden and emerging aspirations,” specifically China and Russia; Israel’s perilous situation; the outcome of the Afghan occupation; and Mexico’s drug-cartel problem.

All of these, he maintained, require an American response. For the Arab Spring, Romney would “train all our soft power resources on” it to see that it brings freedom to “the greater Middle East” — no small task indeed. For Iran, he would deploy aircraft carriers to the eastern Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf and declare that Iran’s obtaining a nuclear weapon is “unacceptable,” which means he is open to intervention, military or otherwise, in that country. For Venezuela, Cuba, and other Latin American countries, he would “launch a campaign to advance economic opportunity in Latin America.” For Afghanistan he would “order a full review of our transition to the Afghan military,” which is to say that, like Obama, he would seek to delay a U.S. withdrawal as long as possible. For Mexico he would “strengthen our cooperation on our shared problems of drugs and security”; ending the War on Drugs — the primary cause of the drug-cartel crisis — is not on Romney’s agenda.

For all his talk about American strength, however, Romney was careful to note that under his administration the United States would go it alone when necessary but would also “exercise leadership in multilateral organizations and alliances,” including the United Nations. There’s no getting “the U.S. out of the U.N.” for him.

Romney, in fact, seeks to intertwine America’s interests with those of foreign countries even further, saying he will “bolster and repair our alliances,” specifically those with the United Kingdom, Israel, and Mexico. But as George Washington pointed out, such permanent alliances have the effect of “facilitating the illusion of an imaginary common interest in cases where no real common interest exists, and infusing into one the enmities of the other, betray[ing] the former into a participation in the quarrels and wars of the latter without adequate inducement or justification.” The enemies of the United Kingdom, Israel, and Mexico need not be the enemies of the United States; but by offering more or less unconditional support to those countries, our government makes their enemies ours — a situation that would not change under a President Romney.

Romney tried to differentiate his foreign policy from that of Obama. He claimed, for instance, that Obama has instituted “massive defense cuts” and does “not want America to be the strongest nation on Earth” when, in fact, defense spending has risen every year of Obama’s presidency (albeit not quite as quickly as in previous years, which saw tremendous growth in the Pentagon’s budget). But as [Foreign Policy’s Michael Cohen](#) observed:

In reality, what Romney is recommending and what Obama is doing as president are not necessarily all that different in practice. They both believe in exceptionalist visions of American power; they both share the view that America has limitless national security interests; they both see the military as a key tool of American power, and neither is terribly interested in embracing a vision of U.S. retrenchment.

This was, of course, also the view of Bush and, indeed, of practically every President since Franklin Roosevelt. In other words, it’s the establishment perspective; and thus it is quite fitting that Romney, the quintessential establishment candidate, has embraced it.

Constitutionalists point out that it was not, however, the opinion of the Founding Fathers, as the previously quoted remarks by Washington make clear. The Founders wisely recommended a noninterventionist foreign policy in which America would trade with all foreign nations but otherwise



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mind her own business, not throw her weight around. Such a policy would keep defense costs low and engender goodwill around the world. The policy promulgated by recent Presidents, which Romney pledges to continue, has brought us the enormously expensive military-industrial complex (and concomitant debt) and made us many enemies.

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