

Needed to Improve the Economy: A Fundamental Shift in U.S. Foreign Policy

Twenty Practical Foreign Policy Changes for Obama's Administration

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[Note: Below is a summary of some of the core ideas I shared in a talk for Every Church a Peace Church on November 10, 2008. Barack Obama's recent foreign policy appointments add urgency to the analysis and policy suggestions I offered. All of his appointments, including Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State, are more hawkish on foreign policy than Obama himself. It is our responsibility to push for meaningful alternatives.]

Barack Obama's first priority as President is to address the nation's economic crisis. Successfully revitalizing and reshaping the US economy, however, will likely depend on fundamentally changing U.S. foreign policies and the role of the United States in world affairs.

The Bush administration voided international law and unleashed U.S. military power in order to insure a dominant role for the United States in world affairs for decades to come. This approach failed miserably. It destroyed nations and killed or displaced millions. It undermined our country's moral standing, diminished national and global security, and *accelerated the pace of U.S. economic decline*.

Although Barack Obama will undoubtedly improve on the disastrous foreign policies of the Bush administration, we need a strong social movement to push the new administration to make *profound changes* in foreign policy. Without such changes and such a movement, I believe Barack Obama's presidency will fail.

Barack Obama's approach to foreign policy should be guided by three key insights.

First, there are no military solutions to most of the nation's or the world's problems.

Second, we will be welcomed as a good global partner or we will fail as a global bully. The world has changed. The United States has no capacity, and the Obama administration should make clear it no longer has any desire, to dominate the world.

Finally, the United States is economically weak due largely to excessive militarization. Stated simply, living standards are declining for most Americans because our nation accounts for approximately half of world military expenditures. Although the present economic crisis is linked to casino capitalism and a deregulated market place, the nation's economic decline is best understood in relation to disastrous and costly wars, excessive military spending, and failed foreign policies.

People throughout the nation and the world are hoping that under Obama's leadership the United States will choose new approaches and pathways to national and global security. U.S. citizens have spoken clearly. We want disastrous wars to end. We want our government to use its power and resources to help make the economy work for average citizens.

Here are twenty practical changes to U.S. foreign policy that will help the Obama administration fruitfully reengage the world and fulfill promises to revitalize and promote greater justice in the U.S. economy:

1. ***Organize a complete and total withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq within nine months of taking office.*** (Ending the costly and counterproductive occupation is essential.)
2. ***Accelerate negotiations and begin withdrawing U.S. troops from Afghanistan while avoiding escalating U.S. military involvement in Pakistan.*** No country in history has successfully occupied Afghanistan. The U.S. lured the Soviet Union into invading Afghanistan in the hopes of bankrupting the Soviet Union. It worked. We are in route to a self-inflicted similar fate. Further militarization of the conflict in Pakistan is also dangerous and thoroughly counterproductive. (Concern: Obama has framed Afghanistan as the good war and promises to redeploy U.S. soldiers from Iraq to Afghanistan. Doing so could derail his presidency. Further military engagement in Pakistan would likely do the same).
3. ***Renounce the Carter Doctrine which says the U.S. has the right to use "any means necessary, including military force," to maintain unrestricted access to Persian Gulf oil.*** Developing renewable energy sources that reduce our use of oil is a far better strategy than fighting wars for oil.
4. ***Commit the United States to policies of nonintervention and respect for international law.*** (Concern: Obama has indicated that he would approve unilateral military strikes in pursuit of al Qaida terrorists. This is a slippery slope. The United States must play by the same rules as other nations or it invites hostility and chaos.)
5. ***Recommit the United States to support and strengthen the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty*** (countries with nukes agree to work towards eliminating them; countries without them agree not to develop them).
6. ***Abandon plans to deploy a missile defense system and engage Russia and China in efforts to reduce the size of nuclear arsenals.*** (Note: the missile defense system is a boondoggle for military contractors but it is an unworkable system that threatens to ignite a new arms race that neither the United States nor the world can afford.)

7. ***Abandon U.S. plans to militarize space. Join with other nations to keep space for peaceful purposes.***
8. ***Commit the United States to strengthen the United Nations.***
9. ***Acknowledge that the gravest security threat to the United States and the world is climate change.*** (Concern: Barack Obama is so much better than his predecessor on this issue that we may be so relieved that we fail to see that he and fellow democrats, although better, are not even close to advocating real solutions. Time is short).
10. ***Convene a global conference with the goal of significantly reducing global military spending and redirecting funds to address climate change and to end global poverty.*** The U.S. should commit to a 50% reduction in military spending as part of this international effort. (Concern: Barack Obama has pledged to increase military spending and the size of the U.S. Army and Marine Corps.)
11. ***Begin dismantling many of the more than 750 permanent foreign U.S. military bases.*** Doing so will both save money and be a visible sign of a U.S. commitment to transition away from foreign policies aimed at global domination to those based on global partnerships.
12. ***Help to stabilize the Middle East by working with nations in the region to have the Middle East declared a nuclear weapons free zone.***
13. ***Engage in serious negotiations with and stop U.S. efforts to scapegoat, vilify and destabilize Iran.*** Iran has legitimate security concerns that need to be addressed as part of a broader effort to reduce tensions in the Middle East, enhance security for Israelis and Palestinians, and secure Iran's help in stabilizing Iraq. (Concern: The good news is that Barack Obama, unlike John McCain, expressed a strong commitment to address disputes with other nations through face to face dialogue and diplomacy. The bad news is that he refused to challenge the dominant narrative that Iran is a grave threat, that it is seeking to build nuclear weapons, and that it must be stopped. He also hasn't addressed the elephant in the room which is the fact that Middle Eastern nation's are troubled by U.S. double standards when it comes to nuclear proliferation and the fact that Israel has more than a hundred nuclear weapons.)
14. ***Engage in determined and balanced diplomacy to address the Israel-Palestine conflict.*** (The U.S. must change its one-sided approach to this conflict or much of the goodwill of the Muslim world towards Obama will quickly dissipate. The Obama administration must

demonstrate concretely that it is committed to both the creation of a viable Palestinian state and to Israeli security.)

15. ***Abandon the “war on terror” and commit the nation to policies that address the root causes of terrorism.*** (The Obama administration must demonstrate clearly that it understands that terrorism is a tactic used by frustrated people not a target that can be eliminated through military violence. There are many ways to lessen terrorism including ending unwise and illegal occupations, promoting economic development, addressing political grievances, and approaching terrorism through a lens of criminality rather than war.)
16. ***Confront the “disastrous rise” of the Military Industrial Complex*** (President Eisenhower’s words.) This complex involves weapons producers, private military contractors, and mercenaries that promote and profit from wars and threats of war. It also includes the costly and inefficient Homeland Security bureaucracy that arose post 9-11. Hundreds of billions of dollars are wasted in this sector each year and any effort to achieve authentic security and to revitalize the economy will depend on shifting resources away from this sector. (Concern: There is no indication that Barack Obama or the democrats generally have any plans to significantly reduce military spending).
17. ***End the disastrous equation of freedom with free markets and disentangle U.S. foreign policies from imposition of failed neoliberal economic policies.*** The present global economic crisis offers further convincing evidence of the failure of the dominant economic model imposed through “free trade” agreements, IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programs and the World Trade Organization.
18. ***Close the prison at Guantanamo Bay and the CIA secret prisons, end the practice of rendering prisoners to third countries to be tortured, and issue a blanket U.S. policy affirming international laws and principles that preclude torture or degrading treatment of prisoners.***
19. ***Take steps to improve relations with Latin American nations, including closing the U.S. Army School of the Americas and normalizing relations with Cuba.***
20. ***Create a cabinet level Department of Peace.***

Please flood Barak Obama and your congressional representatives to let them know how critical the present moment is and how important these changes are.