

FOREIGN POLICY

QUESTIONS ON FOREIGN POLICY FOR THE 2016 CANDIDATES

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Overall vision and strategy for the country.

Most experts agree that the US remains the pre-eminent global power – while also acknowledging that power relationships are in flux as power inevitably devolves to some extent to rising states such as India and China. Americans appear to be wary of new military engagements after the inconclusive wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the continuing, open-ended campaign to degrade terrorist movements such as Al Qaeda and ISIS. Moreover, partisan deadlock at home directly undercuts US standing as a global player and hampers the Nation's ability to address important budgetary needs – e.g., to remedy our decaying infrastructure and to adequately resource the requirements of defense and foreign policy under the so-called budget 'sequester'.

The gridlock has a direct impact on the capacity of the Executive Branch of government – under any president – to lead and conduct the Nation's business. It makes it almost impossible for the Executive and Congress to shape a plan for bringing our resources into balance with our many, far-flung commitments. For example, the partisan gridlock explains to some degree the way in which negotiations on the Iranian nuclear challenge have been conducted. Another striking example is the inability of the United States to join virtually everyone else in ratifying the 1982 Law of the Sea Treaty (despite the strong support of the US defense department and a host of former senior US national security officials and favorable votes in the Senate's foreign relations committee); the net result of this is to disable America's ability to assert and defend its global maritime interests in places such as the Arctic and South China Sea. Gridlock hampers any realistic solution to the situation we face with detainees at the Guantanamo facility. These are just a few examples of the *foreign policy costs* of domestic American dysfunction and gridlock. In this context it is especially difficult for an American president to develop and conduct a coherent foreign policy based on a careful reading of our opportunities and the challenges we face in a turbulent world.

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- What is your overall vision as a foreign policy leader? Do you think we are overcommitted overseas, not doing enough to assert global leadership, or is the current level of US foreign policy effort about right? What commitments would you reassess? Where should we be doing more?

- As a global power with important alliance commitments and other international responsibilities, the US has far flung interests. As you look at the world situation today, are there regions where we are doing too much or not enough?
 - o Would you provide arms to Ukraine?
 - o More troops to Iraq?
 - o Confront China over cyber issues?
 - o Could we do anything about the criminal violence that threatens a number of Central American states?
 - o The Pentagon has ramped up US initiatives – training and special forces operations – in Africa. Should we be doing more, or less, to chase ‘bad guys’ around the Sahel region, North Africa and the Horn of Africa?
 - o Has the time come for a negotiated end of the conflict in Afghanistan, and should we be helping there? Should we keep US troops there?
 - o Do you believe that the Obama administration has paid enough attention to Europe and NATO where key allies face multiple challenges?

Relations with Russia/European policy

Some observers and candidates have described Russia under Putin as our greatest national security challenge, pointing to its violation of internationally recognized borders (Ukraine and Georgia), its threatening and provocative aerial maneuvers on the periphery of other European states including both NATO and EU member states. Russian official rhetoric has become increasingly shrill and antagonistic toward Western policies, while at the same time Putin has attempted to insinuate Russia as a champion of left and right-wing opposition political parties in such countries as Greece, Macedonia, Hungary, Germany and France. Russia’s decision to welcome Edward Snowden – whatever one thinks of his NSA revelations – clearly signaled Putin’s finger-in-your-eye hostility toward the West.

Western sanctions and the oil price collapse have imposed a serious price on the Russian economy and helped to dry up foreign investment there. But there is little evidence that Russia’s illegal and bellicose behavior (including the use of hybrid warfare by its troops and security services) is changing or that Russia will in fact respect the Minsk deals aimed at restoring security in Ukraine. At the same time, it is undeniable that the US and Russia share some common interests on such issues as countering jihadi terrorism and the Iranian nuclear negotiations. Russia’s role in the UN Security Council can either facilitate or block concerted international action on a host of other issues such as UN

peacekeeping, dealing with the Syrian conflict, or supporting a negotiated endgame in Afghanistan. Finally, it is clear that a number of our problems with Russia are really European security challenges, and the US needs European cooperation, support, and coherence in dealing with them.

- Is it possible for the US to be effective in pressuring Russia to end its belligerent conduct and to respect Europe's borders while also seeking Russian cooperation and support for other US priorities?
- What further diplomatic moves and actions would you suggest to get Putin to revise his policies? Arms to Ukraine?
- Should we escalate pressures on Russia (even if our allies won't)? Are we prepared for the consequences if Putin escalates, say in Estonia?
- What can be done to reduce Europe's worrisome dependence on Russian oil and gas, a factor that appears to inhibit a more robust European response to Russia's actions?
- How can the US best persuade our European partners to face up to the need for increased defense efforts at a time when Europe is still recovering from the financial crisis and faces a dramatic refugee crisis?

US Role in the Middle East

Despite the much discussed 'rebalancing' toward Asia, American foreign policy remains to a substantial degree mired in Middle East engagements. US global policy is severely constrained by the extent of these commitments and engagements in a turbulent region that is going through the equivalent of the Reformation in Europe five centuries ago. The challenges facing us there are many, and they have a tendency to overlap and spill into each other: (a) defense of Israel and support for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process; (b) coping with a near nuclear Iran as a regional power; (c) dealing with the Assad problem in Syria; (d) degrading and defeating ISIS in Iraq and Syria while preventing Salafist terrorism from gaining ground; (e) sustaining positive relations with key regional allies Saudi Arabia and Egypt (as well as Jordan and Morocco) while encouraging their positive domestic evolution; (f) helping the only 'success story' of the Arab awakening (Tunisia) while limiting the damage from chaos in Libya and Yemen.

- On Iran, we have worked closely with European partners as well as Russia and China. Is this a good model for other issues or would you prefer a more unilateral approach?
- Since the problems appear so intractable and our need for Middle Eastern oil has declined substantially, should we be trying to lower our profile and downgrade our level of involvement in the region?
- Could the US play its cards more strategically in the region by pushing its major states toward establishing some framework for regional security cooperation, instead of getting sucked into their bellicose games?
- Should we care if our leading Arab partners are deeply authoritarian regimes that oppress their people?
- What do you think of Netanyahu coming to Washington to lobby Congress against American policy on the Iran nuclear challenge ?

- Would you drop the Iran deal and cease de facto cooperation with Iran in the fight against ISIS?

Containment and Engagement with China.

Despite its current economic woes, there is little doubt that a rising China represents a major challenge for US policymakers. That challenge is unfolding in the military-naval balance in East Asia and the Pacific and is reflected in concerns about Chinese efforts to build artificial islands in the South China Sea, to establish 'air defense identification zones' in the East China Sea, to build expanded military capabilities that could challenge American access to China's maritime periphery and American capacity to come to the assistance of treaty allies and friends in the region. The China challenge also is visible in contrasting views between the US and China on a number of global security issues and governance issues that arise in the UN context and elsewhere. It is generally agreed that China is the source of a large share of the cyber attacks being launched against US businesses and government agencies. At the same time, the US and Chinese economies are interdependent in a number of ways. American consumers and American investors arguably gain from these economic relationships. American and Chinese military and naval officers engage in frequent consultations aimed at reducing the risks of accidental incidents and exploring differences over maritime security and sovereignty claims. The Chinese government and the Obama Administration have developed reciprocal commitments on carbon emissions in an effort to address climate change.

- Against this backdrop, what is the best approach for balancing and guiding the US-China relationship?
- Would you continue the Obama's administration's efforts in this area? What would you change? Is China a friend, partner, rival, or enemy?
- Do you favor the idea of reviewing or revising the US defense posture in East Asia in an effort to reduce the likelihood of dangerous clashes between US and Chinese naval and air forces? How could we do this without sending the 'wrong message' to Beijing?
- Is it possible in your view to negotiate some kind of security understandings or a regional security framework in the area?
- How can we best manage our close relationships with key regional allies and partners such as Australia, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines?
- What would you do if North Korea starts to collapse?

Immigration

Much attention has been given to the issue of immigration in the primary debates. It is noteworthy that this is a global challenge, not an exclusively American one. In Europe there is talk of some 800,000 people seeking entry into EU member countries this year as asylum seekers or economic refugees. Many have died in the attempt to do so, and debate continues in a number of European countries about the correct response and how to share the burden of receiving these immigrants. Migration is also an issue in a number of Asian

states. In the US, attention has focused on whether or not to offer undocumented immigrants a path to citizenship, on the status of their American-born children, the best policy for controlling the immigrant pressure on US borders and for treating those people who are already here.

- What is your policy on these issues?
- Do you believe immigrants from Latin America are taking away jobs from American workers or do they mainly take up jobs American citizens don't want?
- What policy toward immigrants is most consistent with American history, American values and American interests?
- Do you support confronting the Mexican government, building a high and costly wall, and sending millions of US residents back south of the border necessitating a huge immigrant roundup operation in the US?

Climate Change

As the Paris meeting of the UN-sponsored climate change process approaches in December of this year, opinion is divided on several aspects of this long standing effort to negotiate a universal and legally binding successor to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. Leaving aside those who basically deny the validity of the science concerning the sources and gravity of climate change, there is general agreement that this is a serious global problem with significant economic, humanitarian, political and national security implications. Senior officers of the US military establishment warn of its implications for international security and for the operating environment for US armed forces. President Obama has elevated the issue of curbing carbon emissions to a prominent place in his agenda, and has taken some controversial steps using executive action to place limits on emissions from US coal fired power plants, among other measures.

Some observers favor a continued international effort to negotiate a UN agreement with legally binding effect to succeed the Kyoto protocol, arguing that the problem is global and that all countries – the major emitters as well as those countries likely to be most seriously affected – should be part of the process. Others point out that a massive UN-based negotiation with 193 other states is inevitably unwieldy, prone to unhelpful coalition politicking, and likely to pit developing nations against developed.

However, this is not necessarily an either/or situation. In their Joint Announcement on Climate Change in November 2014, Obama and China's Xi Jinping announced several national targets reducing or capping growth of carbon emissions and committed to work jointly and with other states toward the goal of adopting a successor climate protocol or other form of universal and legally binding accord at the Paris conference of the parties in December under the 1992 UN Convention on Climate Change. Indications are that we will see UN-based negotiation, bilateral commitments such as these and climate talks in more limited multilateral forums such as the G20 which comprises the world's major economies.

- In light of the likelihood of gridlock in Congress on US domestic legislation, do you believe that president Obama is doing all he can to address these issues?
- How do you come down on the trade-off between coal mining jobs and addressing climate change?
- Is he doing too much, and should the US focus instead on pressuring other countries to up their game on climate?
- Do you believe it is important for the US to be a global leader in this field and how should it lead?

The Opening to Cuba

The Obama Administration moved to terminate the isolation and non-recognition of the Cuban government in 2015, a potentially historic move that was widely welcomed in Latin America and among many in this country and in Cuba itself. A policy of embargoes and sanctions has been ended. A small but proud nation less than 100 miles off our shores remains under the one-party rule of the Marxist regime established by Fidel Castro and now dominated by his brother Raul. Critics of this initiative argue that it risks handing a life jacket to a failing Marxist regime and breaking the morale of long-suffering Cuban opposition voices.

- Do you support the gradual normalization process that has started and would you intend to continue it?
- Have US sanctions against the Havana regime ‘worked’ and could they have continued to work? Do you support lifting the embargo or should we be trying to get a tougher deal?
- What are the best tools for bringing about genuine democratic change in Cuba – should we ramp up American presence, goods and social media activity?

Trade

Since the collapse of the WTO’s Doha round of multilateral trade negotiations over eight years ago, countries in the Pacific region (as well as the Atlantic Community) have looked for alternative ways to liberalize the regional and global trading systems through a growing number of proposed trade agreements at the multilateral, regional, and bilateral level. Continuing an initiative begun by President Bush (43), President Obama has considered that the Trans-Pacific Partnership process was good trade policy and a central pillar of the US strategy of ‘rebalancing’ toward Asia. The 12 current TPP countries account for close to half of world trade.

A TPP pact would be a major milestone in the modern history of trade negotiation, a signal accomplishment for the Administration and a striking example of bipartisan coordination on an issue that tends to unify Republicans and divide Democrats over a range of labor and environmental issues. Seeking to overcome opposition in his own party, the Obama Administration promises that this will be the most progressive trade agreement in history. In June of this year Congress granted the Administration ‘fast track’

negotiating authority on the TPP. But the goal of completing a 12-nation agreement remains elusive due to electoral timetables and a host of national concerns about opening markets in agriculture and dairy products, autos, pharma, intellectual property, investment and services, to name just a few key sticking points. Should the TPP process stall, the question will be whether progress can be made in smaller groupings or in other forums.

- What is your stance on these trade issues which appear to be one area of potential non-partisan policymaking? Is Obama on the right track here, and would you continue these efforts in the TPP context and other regions?
- Opponents of the TPP claim that the 'fast track' authority is a major victory for big money and major corporations who seek to use these negotiations to further liberalize – i.e. deregulate – trade regimes, impose US domestic standards on other countries, and weaken worker and environmental protections. What is your answer to those charges?

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