



America at Risk

Memo

Protect America Month: Providing for the Common Defense in the 21st Century

The Heritage Foundation's Protect America Month is a month-long campaign focusing on the need for increased defense spending in the 21st century. America still faces serious threats in the world and now is not the time to weaken our military through defense budget cuts.

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The Decline of U.S. Leadership Threatens America's Position as the World's Superpower

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The United States faces a world that is ever more dangerous, with the looming specter of a nuclear-armed Iran, mounting turmoil in North Africa, a resurgent and increasingly aggressive Russia in Europe, a rising authoritarian China in the East, a malevolent rogue state in North Korea, and the global threat of Islamist terrorism. Yet Washington seems almost passive in the face of these huge challenges, with an Administration clearly lacking any coherent long-term vision for maintaining America's place as the world's superpower. From Tehran to Tripoli, the Obama Administration has been spectacularly slow to lead.

Just a few years ago the United States was genuinely feared on the world stage, and dictatorial regimes, strategic adversaries, and state sponsors of terrorism trod carefully in the face of the world's most powerful nation. Now the U.S. appears weak, rudderless, and frequently confused in its approach. This is a dangerous state of affairs that will only embolden America's enemies, confuse its allies, and weaken U.S. global power.

The Antithesis of Reagan's Leadership

There appears to be no great cause driving President Barack Obama's foreign policy—no overarching strategy for enhancing American power, no concept of a global war against Islamist militants, and no desire to strengthen America's defenses. His approach to international affairs is the exact opposite of that of Ronald

Reagan. It is based upon a naïve belief that America's enemies can be won over through "engagement" rather than confronted with maximum strength, and that U.S. security can be advanced by making major concessions.

In contrast to Reagan, Obama fails to see the United States as an exceptional nation with a unique role in leading the free world and standing up to tyranny. In his speeches abroad, he has frequently found fault with his own country rather than projecting confidence in American greatness. From Cairo to Strasbourg, he has adopted an apologetic tone instead of demonstrating faith in America as a shining city on a hill, a beacon of freedom and liberty. A leader who lacks pride in his own nation's historic role as a great liberator simply cannot project strength abroad.

The Downgrading of America's Alliances

A key failing of Obama's foreign policy has been his willingness to offend or even undermine key U.S. allies to try to appease hostile regimes, strategic competitors, or even entire blocs of countries in the Islamic world or Latin America. In fact, the Obama team has done more to undercut America's friends than any U.S. Administration in modern memory.

Prime examples have included the Obama Administration's strong-arm tactics toward Benjamin Netanyahu over Israeli settlements; surrender to Moscow over missile defense, thereby throwing the Poles and Czechs

under the bus; the decision to side with ousted Marxists in Honduras; and support for Argentina in its calls for U.N.-brokered negotiations over the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands. All of these actions have caused considerable tensions with America's true friends, while delivering no tangible benefits whatsoever for Washington. They simply projected a lack of loyalty and considerable weakness.

The Administration has paid scant attention to the preservation and building of America's traditional alliances, including the vital Anglo-American Special Relationship, which has been the beating heart of the transatlantic alliance for more than 70 years. The Special Relationship has been significantly downgraded and at times humiliated under the Obama Presidency, which has displayed a shocking disregard for America's most important partner and strategic ally. The view of the current Administration was summed up by a senior State Department official, who declared in March 2009:

*There's nothing special about Britain. You're just the same as the other 190 countries in the world. You shouldn't expect special treatment.*¹

A Lack of Concern for Human Rights

It has also become abundantly clear that the Obama White House attaches little importance to international human rights issues, and in contrast to the previous Administration, it has not pursued a freedom agenda in the Middle East and elsewhere. Instead, this Administration has been all too willing to sacrifice U.S. leadership in deference to supranational institutions such as the United Nations, whose track record in standing up to dictatorships has been virtually nonexistent.

The Obama Administration places far greater value on engagement with hostile regimes, even if they are committing gross human rights abuses, in the mistaken belief that appeasement enhances security. This has been the approach with Iran, Russia, and North Korea. When protesters took to the streets to demonstrate against the Islamist dictatorship in Iran in 2009,

for example, the brutal repression that greeted them barely merited a response from the American Presidency. Meanwhile, the Administration has been quick to extend the hand of friendship to brutal tyrants, such as Omar Hassan al-Bashir, despite the fact that the genocidal Sudanese government and its proxy Janjaweed Arab militias had butchered hundreds of thousands of people. President Obama's special envoy to Sudan, retired Air Force Major General J. Scott Gration, described the new strategy of appeasement:

*We've got to think about giving out cookies. Kids, countries—they react to gold stars, smiley faces, handshakes, agreements, talk, engagement.*²

U.S. Leadership Must Be Restored on the World Stage

In an increasingly dangerous world, President Obama has adopted a meek, deer-in-the-headlights approach to U.S. leadership. While America's foes grow stronger, the United States appears weaker and more vulnerable. At the same time, U.S. alliances with Great Britain, Israel, Japan, and Central and Eastern Europe have all taken a hit from a White House that has been more concerned with apologizing to hostile adversaries than strengthening friendships with key allies.

The Obama Administration's timid foreign policy is the last thing the world needs at a time of mounting turmoil in the Middle East, including the growing threat of a nuclear-armed Iran, and Islamist militancy on the rise from Egypt to Yemen. U.S. leadership is now needed more than ever, but has embarrassingly gone AWOL on the world stage.

The President has spectacularly failed to project an image of America as a unique superpower that has made huge sacrifices in the defense of liberty across the world, from the beaches of Normandy to the battlefields of Afghanistan. Under the Obama doctrine, American exceptionalism has been a meaningless concept rather than a central tenet of U.S. strategic thinking.

1. Tim Shipman, "Barack Obama 'Too Tired' to Give Proper Welcome to Gordon Brown," *The Sunday Telegraph*, March 9, 2009, at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/barackobama/4953523/Barack-Obama-too-tired-to-give-proper-welcome-to-Gordon-Brown.html> (April 26, 2011).

2. Stephanie McCrummen, "U.S. Envoy's Outreach to Sudan is Criticized as Naïve," *The Washington Post*, September 29, 2009, at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/28/AR2009092802336_pf.html (April 26, 2011).

The Obama Administration is overseeing and implementing the biggest decline in American global power since Jimmy Carter. Only by rebuilding America's defenses, decisively reducing the budget deficit, projecting powerful international leadership, and restoring vital alliances can the United States overcome

the grave threats and challenges it faces in the 21st century.

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This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
<http://report.heritage.org/ar1102>



PROTECT AMERICA

The 21st century will be a dangerous place if America fails to protect itself and its allies.

This product is part of the Protect America Initiative, one of 10 transformational initiatives in our Leadership for America campaign.