



MEMORANDUM TO INTERESTED PARTIES

TO: Interested Parties

FR: Michèle Flournoy and Colin Kahl, Advisors to President Obama's Re-Election Campaign on National Security Issues

RE: Mitt Romney's Seventh Foreign Policy Speech – Finally Time for Some Specifics?

Since the beginning of this campaign, we have repeatedly pressed Mitt Romney to outline specific ideas about the biggest foreign policy challenges our nation is facing today. We've asked him to move beyond swagger and slogans to an actual strategy.

We have asked him to say how he would end the war in Afghanistan and bring our troops home, and how he would finish the job against al-Qaeda. We have asked him what he would do to confront Iran that President Obama is not already doing. We have asked him why he would have left tens of thousands of troops in Iraq, as he's said both publicly and privately in his now-infamous leaked fundraiser video. And we have asked him what policies he would pursue to deal with the upheaval that has swept across the Middle East and North Africa.

But so far, he has failed to answer any of these questions. Today, when Mitt Romney gives his seventh speech on foreign policy issues, he has a chance to finally tell the American people what he would do as commander-in-chief, and to outline an alternative vision that voters can consider when making their choice this November. We'll see if he's up to the challenge.

The fact is that Barack Obama has one of the strongest national security records of any President in generations – he has decimated al Qaeda's leadership, taken out Osama bin Laden, ended the war in Iraq, provided unparalleled support to Israel, produced unprecedented pressure on Iran, strengthened our alliances, and restored our standing in the world.

In contrast, Mitt Romney has, throughout this campaign, raised more questions than answers about what he'd actually do as President. He supported the Iraq war and said that removing all of our troops from Iraq was "tragic," he called Russia - not al-Qaeda - our "number one geopolitical foe," and he said that he wouldn't have set a timeline to end the war in Afghanistan. Those aren't policies, those are misguided talking points – and the American people deserve more from someone running to be commander-in-chief.

Today's latest effort to reboot and reset the Romney foreign policy doesn't change the fact that he's repeatedly taken positions outside of the mainstream and often to the right of even George W. Bush. This isn't surprising. After all, Romney is advised by the same people who were responsible for some of the worst foreign policy failures in American history, including the Iraq War. And now he wants to take us back to the same with-us-or-against-us approach that got us into wars without getting us out of them.

For example, Governor Romney still can't say what he'd do differently on Iran other than taking us to war. He continues to criticize the President's timeline in Afghanistan even while saying he'd pursue it as President. His position on Libya has no credibility since he's been both for and against our Libya policy. And he offers no way forward on Syria other than suggesting that the United States should get more deeply involved in the conflict without defining a strategy.

Governor Romney's unseemly response to the tragic murder of our Ambassador in Libya raises further questions about his judgment on national security issues. Let's acknowledge first that international crises happen during every administration, and the real question for voters is who they want to be commander-in-chief when they do. And the clear choice in this election was brought into stark relief when the situation in Benghazi unfolded.

Governor Romney's first (and second and third and fourth) instinct was to play politics with the tragedy and attempt to score political points in any way he could. As Romney said he would do in that leaked fundraiser video, he has tried to take advantage of an international crisis for pure political gain. That's not only cynical – it's offensive.

Governor Romney's response to the situation in Benghazi was calculated and irresponsible. And the American people recognized Romney's behavior for what it was: negative editorials arguing that he is not ready to be commander-in-chief flooded newspapers in battleground states like Florida, Ohio, Virginia, and Colorado.

So while Governor Romney will try to convince voters today that he can speak seriously about what's happening in Libya and the wider region, the American people have already decided how they felt about the Republican nominee's response to this tragedy – and they didn't like what they saw.

In contrast, President Obama showed statesmanlike and steady leadership – comforting the grieving families, friends, and colleagues; working with leaders in the region to call for calm and to protect our people; and pledging to bring those responsible to justice. This is the same steady leadership he has shown since the Arab revolutions began – supporting people across the region as they demand greater freedom, holding new governments accountable for their behavior, and making it clear to extremists that we will defend our citizens and our interests.

Needless to say, the American people know that when this President pledges to find and bring terrorists to justice, he means what he says.

“Mainstream” foreign policy isn’t what Mitt Romney is putting forward: wanting to keep troops in Iraq indefinitely; exploding our defense spending to levels the Pentagon has not asked for, with no way to pay for it; insulting our allies and partners around the world; and calling Russia our number-one geopolitical foe. If that’s where Mitt Romney thinks the mainstream is, he needs to find a much better compass.

The bar is high for Governor Romney during his speech today. After six previous chances, it is up to him to finally clear it. Because while the American people can trust Barack Obama’s strong record of winding down wars and decimating al-Qaeda, Mitt Romney has repeatedly shown that he has no idea what he’d actually do as commander-in-chief. In today’s complicated world, that’s just not good enough.

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