

Mitt Romney's Cutting-Edge Middle East Strategy

Contributed by Walid Phares
Monday, 30 January 2012

As the US electoral process grinds on and Republican primary debates fold into state primaries and caucuses, candidates' views on national security and foreign policy are being carefully scrutinized by voters who consider them crucial components of the total policy package a candidate will carry into the Oval Office.

Citizens' attention is understandably riveted to candidates' proposals for solving our national economic crisis. And, while there is little doubt that the condition of our economy will weigh heavily in the final outcome of the 2012 vote, US national security will undoubtedly play a huge role in the evolution of our national economy for the foreseeable future.

After 9/11 and throughout the first post-9/11 decade we have known that a meltdown in the Middle East would destabilize economic partnerships and jeopardize the flow of oil and energy to the West. We've also known that an increase of jihadi radicalism in the region will boost the chances of war and human rights abuses and lead to more terrorist attacks against the US Homeland. The security of the United States and other democratic societies will be at risk if the Middle East is abandoned to radicals and radical regimes.

The foreign policy and national security strategy of only one of the four remaining Republican candidates is adequate against this tenuous scenario. Ron Paul's agenda for the Middle East will guarantee a nuclear Iran, turn North Africa over to the Islamists, and ignore the next wave of jihadists who have trained their sites on the US Homeland. Congressman Paul may be a staunch advocate for citizens' Constitutional rights, but in my modest view, his vision for US Foreign Policy may force Americans into a national security predicament as bad as or worse than that of a second Obama administration.

I respect and admire all three leading candidates' and their positions on the Middle East and US national security. In the interest of full disclosure, I must admit that I have worked with all three at different times and find their strategic understanding of the threat to be as grave as my own, though differently expressed. Speaker Gingrich and Senator Santorum have long-warned about the Iranian threat in both in the surrounding region and globally. Their characterization of the jihadi threat as existential hits the bull's-eye. From my own field of research and publishing, I have not authored or opined on domestic social and economic issues, so I praise all three candidates, Gingrich, Santorum and Romney, for seeing and warning about the threat.

As Senior Advisor to Governor Mitt Romney on matters of National Security and Foreign Policy, and one of three co-chairs on the Middle East and North Africa, I would like to share with readers why I believe Governor Romney's platform on the region is more advanced than the other candidates' platforms and the best alternative to the Obama Administration's agenda on the Middle East. Governor Romney's edge over the other candidates is his perception of the threat and understanding of the enemy's tactics. His strategy for victory is precise and reasoned. For more than two decades, I have focused intensely on the strategies of America's enemies, not just their ideology. The most-read book of three I wrote on jihadism and published after 9/11 is *Future Jihad: Terrorist Strategies against America*. The book enabled lawmakers on both sides of the Atlantic and many in the US defense and national security communities to understand the fundamentals of the conflict. The US is confronting an ideologically-driven force with a global strategy. The latter area is where I see Governor Romney's strategic edge. Knowledge of where the threat is coming from is crucial. Understanding its ideological roots is a must. But understanding our enemies' strategy and devising an appropriate counter-strategy that is part of a broader US strategy that advances freedom and democracy, saves the national economy, and stabilizes the world economy, in my view are what make the Governor's agenda cutting-edge.

The Romney strategy acknowledges and praises US successes in taking down the al Qaeda terrorist commanders Bin Laden, al Awlaki and al Zarqawi as well as the capturing other senior leaders and hundreds of al Qaeda terrorists over the past ten years. But the strategy extends beyond trench warfare with the movement. America's strategy must go beyond beheading a terrorist network which subscribes to an ideology that can grow new heads faster than the US can take them out. Mitt Romney's al Qaeda strategy considers where the organization will be in five years, not just where it was five years ago.

On all battlefields where the Jihadists operate, the Romney strategy will be based on day to day achievements on the ground, and a solid understanding of the enemy's next targets. We will anticipate and intercept their mutations before they begin, not after. In Yemen, despite al Awlaki's elimination, al Qaeda is seizing villages. Al Shabab is

wreaking havoc in Somalia; in major oil-producing Nigeria, Boko Haram is expanding; in Iraq, Salafi jihadists have returned to detonate car bombs; in Libya, al Qaeda flags are flying in Tripoli. The real fight against al Qaeda is in front of us, not behind. A super-global strategy must be applied, not the current retreat and declare success strategy.

On Iran, the current administration claims to have assembled all tools needed to keep the growing threat in check, but continues to try and reason with the regime. All three Republican candidates know that the Iranian regime must be considered as a threat to regional US and international security interests. All three want the regime to end as an ultimate solution to the menace. Mitt Romney is interested in how, with whom and when this can be accomplished. In his definitive Wall Street Journal article, the Governor underlined two pillars of his strategy. One certifies the regime is driving the Iranian nuclear threat. He wants the Iranian to disappear like Qaddafi's. In addition to US efforts to contain the Iranian military and terror networks, the Governor sees the Iranian people, the "Green Revolution, the regime's primary opposition, as the real US partner in removing the regime.

On these three grounds the Romney agenda for the Middle East provides a strategically-advanced vision—counter radical jihadi ideology, partner with the Iranian people against the Iranian regime, and equip US defense with a vision that intercepts the threat rather than react to it.

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