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Obama Takes on the Muslim World

By [John Taylor](#)

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In the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, George W. Bush recognized that Israel's endless war on the Palestinians, a grossly unequal struggle waged with the military, financial, and diplomatic support of the United States, had put America at risk. For a brief moment, Bush [spoke strongly](#) of the need to establish a Palestinian state and bring the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to a speedy and just conclusion. Bush even demanded an end to Israeli incursions into the West Bank and the targeted assassinations of Palestinian leaders.

In very little time, the president realized that acknowledging America's own foreign policy in the Middle East had put America in the terrorist crosshairs was unlikely to be a vote-getter, particularly among the Republican Party's Evangelical faithful, who view the establishment of the state of Israel as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. So the president, with the eager support of both parties and a tame corporate media, chose the explanation that foreigners willing to fly airplanes into buildings must hate America's freedom and openness, our margaritas and miniskirts. This facile and entirely specious assertion was a much more palatable explanation for 9/11 than that American intervention, particularly U.S. support of corrupt Arab kings and potentates, a blank check for Israeli adventurism, and a murderous embargo on the Iraqi people, had provoked an intense hatred of the U.S. among a small but growing percentage of Muslims around the world.

Fast forward though the invasion of Iraq, justified by entirely bogus intelligence, through years of fighting in Afghanistan, bringing nothing but misery to the Afghan people, and through Israel's brutal pounding of Lebanon and Gaza, to the election of a new American president determined to make a fresh start with the Muslim world. Barack Obama's visit to Cairo in June of last year to deliver a much-ballyhooed [speech](#) seemed to break with the policies of the Bush administration, which had been perceived, especially in the Arab states, as blatantly anti-Arab and anti-Muslim. As part of Obama's determination to change America's profile among the world's billion Muslims, he subsequently insisted that Israel end all settlement activity in Palestinian lands captured in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, a stance consistent with international law and favored by most of America's allies.

As Bush learned in 2001, pressure on Israel, no matter how justified, takes courage and has political costs. The Democratic Party has long received a large proportion of its financial support from Israel's friends in the United States, and Israel has many advocates in the Obama administration, the best example being the president's chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel, who served in the Israeli army. So President Obama quickly surrendered to Israel's American constituency, dropped his insistence that settlement of Palestinian lands cease, and began to pressure the Palestinian Authority's weakling President Mahmoud Abbas to resume negotiations without preconditions.

To put a seal on Obama's humiliation at the hands of right-wing Israeli politicians Bibi Netanyahu and Avigdor Lieberman, the Obama administration sidelined the [Goldstone Report](#) detailing war crimes during the Gaza war ("willful killings and willful causing great suffering" to the civilian population and "collective punishment intentionally inflicted by the government of Israel on the people of the Gaza Strip"), signed a multi-year, \$30 billion defense protocol with the Israelis, and rebuked U.S. Middle East negotiator George Mitchell for saying quite accurately that the U.S. had once withheld U.S. loan guarantees as a way showing displeasure at settlement activity.

At the same time, President Obama did nothing to alleviate the sufferings of 1.4 million desperate Palestinians under Israeli siege in Gaza. How bad are conditions in Gaza? Some 80 percent of its residents rely on foreign assistance, and unemployment is above 40 percent. Medical supplies, fuel, and food are routinely held up at the Israeli border. Half of Gaza's schools have not been repaired from Israel's onslaught a year ago. Almost unbelievably, the Obama administration has made suffering in Gaza worse by pressuring the Egyptian government to [close smuggling tunnels](#) connecting Gaza with Egyptian Sinai, which provided an alternative means of moving a trickle of goods around the Israeli blockade. Although Americans may close their eyes to the miserable existence Israel is inflicting on the people of Gaza, who have done nothing to harm the United States and do not threaten us in any way, Americans may be certain that our complicity has not gone unnoticed across the Muslim world.

The Obama administration has also maintained the Bush administration's hostility to Syria. The Commerce Department recently [vetoed](#) the sale of European-manufactured Airbus commercial airliners to Syrian Air, which the Commerce Department was apparently able to do because 10 percent of the aircraft's components are made in the U.S. Just what American strategic objective is furthered by forcing Syrians to fly around in clapped-out, Soviet-vintage commercial aircraft is

unknown. Will the Syrian man in the street love us for putting his life at risk when he flies from Damascus to Aleppo? Or is this simply another case in which the interests of Israel trump those of the U.S.?

It is also worth noting that Gen. David Petraeus, that most political of all generals, has continued to accuse Syria of supporting the Sunni insurgency in Iraq. This charge is beyond absurd. Why would the government in Damascus seek to undermine the regime in Baghdad when both governments are closely allied with Iran? It is of course possible that some of the 1.5 Sunni Iraqi refugees in Syria are covertly supporting resistance in Iraq, but that is as might be expected and reflects the desperate mess the U.S. has created in Iraq, where some 25 percent of the population has fled to Syria or Jordan, or are internally displaced.

Although President Obama also sought a “[new beginning](#)” with Iran, he never directed any of the policy changes that would make that possible. Crucially, the U.S. continues to spend hundreds of millions of dollars annually to bring about regime change in Iran, prompting Iran’s spiritual leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, to [remark](#), “Money, arms, and organizations are being used by the Americans directly across our western border to fight the Islamic Republic.” U.S. anti-Iranian activities range from protecting the MEK terrorist group in Iraq for use in cross-border raids and subversion to funding American NGOs, whose support of “Twittering revolutionaries” on the streets of Tehran may be passed off as “promoting democracy” in the West, but which looks to the Iranian government like just another American attempt to destabilize the Islamic Republic.

American diplomacy certainly does not aim for reconciliation with Iran. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has sought international help, particularly in Europe, to impose “crippling” sanctions on the country. After a meeting with Bibi Netanyahu, Obama himself agreed to set up an American-Israeli working group to consider what coercive steps could be taken against Iran if it did not abandon nuclear enrichment. And American officials have continued to threaten military action over Tehran’s nuclear program, even though there is no meaningful data to overturn the most recent National Intelligence Estimate on Iran, which held that the country gave up work on an atomic weapon in 2003. To suggest that Iran, with a military budget one one hundredth of what the U.S. spends on its armed forces, is a threat to the U.S. is the height of absurdity. To brand Iran a proliferator for its low-level enrichment of uranium while ignoring Israel’s 200 nuclear weapons is the height of hypocrisy.

In Afghanistan, the Obama administration added 17,000 U.S. troops last year and is in the process of adding 30,000 more. In eight years of war, the U.S. has brought misery to the civilian population and a gang of corrupt politicians to power in Kabul in an obviously bogus election. What is the Obama administration going to do in the next seven years that hasn’t been tried in the last eight? To give the situation a bit of perspective, the last man to pacify Afghanistan was Alexander the Great in the 4th century B.C. Why Gen. McChrystal thinks an American-trained Afghan army recruited from various ethnic minorities in the north of the country will ever suppress an insurgency centered on Pashtun tribes, which comprise almost half the population of Afghanistan, is difficult to fathom. Well, no one would ever confuse McChrystal with Alexander, except maybe [Victor Davis Hanson](#).

The war in Afghanistan has now spilled over into Pakistan, where administration pressure on the Pakistani army to fight the Taliban and its allies has produced hundreds of thousands of refugees and is destabilizing the country. America's contribution to the widening war has been drone strikes on suspected Taliban leaders. The U.S. is also conducting anti-terrorist operations in Somalia and Yemen in the same way. The problem with this strategy is twofold. First, the drone would be a great weapon if it only killed the bad guys. Many drone strikes (and strikes from conventional aircraft, for that matter) have killed completely innocent people, undoubtedly increasing the number of America's enemies. Second, where the U.S. relies on an ally's intelligence service for targeting data, as in Yemen, there is a very good chance that enemies of the local regime, not al-Qaeda, are being hit.

Sometimes the Obama administration lashes out at the Muslim world in ways that are difficult to comprehend. In the wake of the failed underwear bombing, the TSA named [14 countries](#) whose citizens would receive "full-body pat-downs" before boarding U.S.-bound aircraft: Afghanistan, Algeria, Cuba, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Syria, Sudan, and Yemen. Obviously, any suspicious passenger ought to be selected for special screening, but the TSA's message seems to be that if someone hails from Syria or Algeria, they possess murderous intent, thus confirming to millions of Muslims that the U.S. is deeply prejudiced against them.

As long as the Obama administration believes it can bomb, starve, invade, occupy, and intimidate the Muslim world into submission, and as long as the administration willingly makes Israel's enemies America's enemies, the U.S. will be a terrorist target and locked into endless wars in faraway places.