

NAVIGATING THE NEW MIDDLE EAST? THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION IS LOST AT SEA AND ON THE ROCKS

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By [Barry Rubin](#)

This article surveys all aspects of U.S. Middle East policy under the Obama administration, critiques this strategy and premises, and suggests what U.S. policy should be.

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The Obama administration has comprehensively lost its way on Middle East policy to an extent that poses tremendous dangers to the United States, Western interests, and the region as a whole. The cost of these mistakes will be—and already has been—serious losses, crises, and violent conflicts. People in the area will pay heavily in blood and suffering due to these miscomprehensions and miscalculations.

Despite these obvious problems, the mass media and academic experts have tended to ignore, misunderstand, or apologize for them. This failure of critical institutions to fulfill their watch-dog and evaluation tasks has worsened the situation, since corrections have not been made and honest debates have not taken place. Nothing illustrates the depth and extent of the problem more than a balanced survey. Consequently, this article presents three aspects of contemporary U.S. Middle East policy and the problems it faces. The first section provides the basic premises of the situation under the Obama administration. The second section discusses what its strategy should be. The third section looks at the various current issues with brief discussions on the gap between actual policy and preferable policy.

THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION'S CONCEPT OF THE MIDDLE EAST^[1]

To an extent greater than any modern predecessor, the Obama administration has abandoned traditional diplomatic and international affairs concepts. This does not mean that they have been abandoned completely or that there is no continuity on Middle East policy, but the basic change has been greater than in the past. In particular, ideas such as realpolitik, power politics, leverage, rewarding allies and punishing enemies, credibility, and deterrence have been questioned or undermined. While the onset of the “Arab Spring” starting in January 2011 altered administration policy from the original framework in favor of reform and democratization—though, as shall be seen, not always—the same basic pattern continued. Some of the administration’s “new thinking” attitudes are discussed as follows.

First, is the importance of popularity. While wanting to be liked by other countries and their people is something of a theme in U.S. foreign policy history—in sharp contrast to almost every other government in the world—it has never become as high a priority as in the Obama administration. The desire to be popular has shaped administration policies. That Obama had made the United States popular again was one of

the administration's main claimed successes—though reliable polls did not necessarily show this to be true. To be popular, of course, required avoiding confrontations with others (even at times when there were conflicting interests) and showing special sensitivity (at times pandering) to what others wanted to hear. This was a perceived contrast with the preceding Bush administration, which was seen as making America especially disliked.

Together with popularity was the idea that the administration must get along with Islam. The interpretation was that being liked required a hypersensitivity toward Islam, going beyond the strong effort at carefulness followed by the preceding president in the wake of the September 11 attacks. While it was not noticed, there was far less emphasis on getting along with Arab nationalism. The president's unique personal experience and sympathy with Islam was a partial factor in this orientation, seen in his Cairo and Istanbul speeches, his banning of anything that even seemed to hint at a problem with radical political Islamism, and such symbolic gestures as ordering the head of NASA to focus on appreciating (that is, largely forging) some great Muslim contribution to space exploration.

The next policy adjustment was the redefinition of the Middle East in Islamic terms. This is a revolutionary, albeit virtually unnoticed, change and was the core idea of Obama's June 2009 Cairo speech. Since the 1950s, the Arabic-speaking world's politics functioned largely within the framework of Arab nationalism. Western policies dealt with the area in those terms. Yet Obama's "Islamic" approach undermined that. This would become tremendously important with the development of the "Arab Spring," when Arab nationalist regimes and identity clashed with Islamist identity and opposition movements.

Another new attitude has been the administration's very specific view of terrorism and the threat to U.S. interests. According to the Obama administration concept, al-Qa'ida is a dangerous enemy because it attacked the United States directly. However, Hizballah, the Muslim Brotherhood, and even the Taliban (it allegedly has a moderate wing with which the United States is negotiating) can be moderated and rendered non-hostile to the United States. If not for pressure from pro-Israel forces, the administration would probably extend this to Hamas (a position that Obama's terrorism advisor, John Brennan, has stated privately). Thus, there is no war on terrorism (since only a small portion of terrorism is hostile and dangerous) and there is no war on revolutionary Islamism (since that might offend Muslims and many Islamists can be managed) but only a war on al-Qa'ida.

The Obama administration has also shifted its emphasis to reconciling enemies rather than supporting friends. Believing in the importance of popularity, the potential moderation of Islamists, the avoidance of conflict, the priority on conciliating Islam, etc., the administration has put the emphasis on winning over enemies. The Muslim Brotherhood, Iran, and Syria are to be engaged. Compromise is possible with the Taliban (or part of it). No criticism is to be made of the Palestinian Authority (PA) or the Islamist-oriented Turkish regime.

At the same time, the concerns not only of Israel but also traditional Arab allies—former President Husni Mubarak's Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and smaller Gulf Arab monarchies—have been neglected. These factors are not fully consulted and the Obama administration quickly backed Mubarak's downfall. Similarly, while showing great consideration for the Egyptian and Tunisian oppositions that were challenging pro-U.S. governments, the Obama administration gave little help or even verbal support to the oppositions in Iran, Lebanon, Syria, or Turkey, which opposed anti-American governments.

Further, the administration has been downplaying American leadership. It very explicitly criticized U.S.

policy in the past as being insensitive, imperialistic, and bullying while expressing a desire to be merely an equal partner. It placed more dependence on the choices of allies, the UN, and even the Arab League (notably on the Libya issue).

In addition, while other administrations criticized Israel and supported the Palestinians, the Obama administration went further in trying to distance itself from Israel in public perception. This situation should not be exaggerated. U.S.-Israel relations continued to function well on the military level, and there was no real pressure applied. Yet that is the point: the Obama administration wanted to be seen as further away from Israel and more supportive of the Palestinians as part of its strategy intended to win support from Muslims and Arabs.

Similarly, the Obama administration was not unique in its highlighting of Israel-Palestinian issues and putting a priority on the “peace process.” What made the administration different from its predecessors is that it continued this orientation even after failures might have been expected to make it change priorities. Thus, it seemed as if its attitude on the issue had a stronger aspect of ideological preconception rather than a pragmatic belief that progress could be realistically expected.

—The last element of the Obama strategy is the belief that change must be good and democracy inevitably triumphant. Similar to its domestic worldview, the Obama administration enthusiastically embraced the “Arab Spring,” clearly arguing that nothing could go wrong and that a revolutionary Islamist “hijacking” of these events and takeover of power was not possible. Ironically, this was a caricature of the Bush policy that Obama’s supporters had ridiculed.

All of these ideas are wrong, dangerous, and likely to lead to defeats for the United States, the weakening of its allies, the strengthening of its enemies, and the spawning of future crises.

WHAT SHOULD THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION BE DOING?

To understand what U.S. policy should be, it is necessary to understand the current reality of the Middle East. The central issue is the struggle of revolutionary Islamists to seize control of individual countries and the region as a whole. They are seeking to overthrow existing governments, fundamentally transform those societies, wipe Israel off the map, and expel Western—and especially U.S.—influence from the region.^[2] This is, to say the least, a critical challenge. Yet it is a threat that the Obama administration does not even recognize. The Islamist forces are not united and there are three basic groupings.

First are al-Qa’ida and its constituent groups organized in a loose umbrella, to mix a metaphor. This bloc can cause serious trouble and kill people, but its dependence on a single tactic, terrorism, also makes it much weaker than Islamist forces that are strategically wise and tactically flexible. Al-Qa’ida can blow things up, but it cannot seize state power. Consequently, this bloc that the Obama administration has focused on as the main threat is by far the least dangerous.

The second Islamist force is the Iran-led bloc. This consists of Iran, Syria, Hamas, Hizballah, and the Iraqi insurgents. The Turkish regime has aligned with this group as well. It came into control of Lebanon too.

Last, is a possible Muslim Brotherhood bloc. The “Arab Spring,” however, strengthened Sunni Islamists, especially in Egypt and Syria while to a lesser extent in Libya and Tunisia. Consequently, a new Muslim Brotherhood bloc has emerged to some extent and has been attractive for both Hamas and Turkey. It is still far behind the Iran-led bloc, but a measure of power in Egypt would promote its interests greatly. If it can align many Sunni Islamists behind it in opposition to Shi’a, the Iran-led bloc could be circumscribed and lose some of its appeal.

There should be no illusion, however, that the problem is “only” al-Qa’ida or that radical Islamist elements from any grouping could be won over. They are all anti-American and anti-Western due both to their ideology and interests. When Islamists and radicals complained, for example, about U.S. support for the Mubarak regime, they were not decrying a lack of democracy but how Washington was blocking their own revolutionary success.

To meet this threat, the U.S. course should be clear. What is needed is American leadership of a broad and loose coalition opposing the spread of revolutionary Islamist power and rule. Such a non-institutionalized alignment would consist of the United States and Canada, European democracies, relatively moderate Arab states, and Israel. In terms of cooperation, it would also include opposition movements opposing radical regimes, notably in Iran, Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey. Eventually, it might also work with democratic forces horrified by growing Islamist power in their countries, notably in Egypt and Tunisia.

In order to provide such leadership, the U.S. government would have to have a clear view of friends and enemies, understand the revolutionary Islamist ideology and methods, maintain its credibility, and reward friends while punishing enemies. Unfortunately, this approach is virtually the opposite of the Obama administration’s policies, which have in fact undermined what is required for success. Without making any actual strategic gain, U.S. interests have suffered four serious defeats during the first half of the Obama administration:

First, was the loss of Egypt as America’s main Arab ally and its possible turn toward the other side. Second, was the consolidation of Hamas’ control over the Gaza Strip, now further fortified with its growing status as an Egyptian protectorate. The third factor was Lebanon’s takeover by a Hizballah-led government that looks to Syria and Iran as patrons. Last, was the virtual defection of Turkey, governed by an Islamist regime, to the other side.

Not all of these are completely Obama’s fault, but he bears a large measure of the responsibility. Moreover, potential gains—represented by revolts in Iran and Syria—were given no support by Washington. Additional secondary losses could also be listed.

The Israel-Palestinian conflict, which so often is put at the center of the region (and even crowds out every other issue in the consciousness of policymakers, “experts,” and the mass media), is of minimal importance in all this. One could provide a blow-by-blow description of the administration’s flailing about on this issue, but it is not really worthwhile. In the end, despite the sound and fury involved, the “peace process” diplomacy changed little and signified nothing.

THE SPECIFIC ISSUES AND CHALLENGES AT STAKE

The shortcomings of the Obama administration's policy emerge with startling clarity when one inventories precisely what has happened and how it has managed these challenges. These are presented in alphabetical order:

Afghanistan

The U.S. military strategy in Afghanistan was based on the erroneous belief that American military forces could help create a stable and developing democratic polity in that country. After an overly long decisionmaking process, Obama opted for withdrawing U.S. forces while seeking a deal with the "moderate wing" of the Taliban. The problem is that a war in Afghanistan is unwinnable; that the Taliban will not disappear and is already going on the offensive in anticipation of U.S. withdrawal; Pakistan is a thoroughly unreliable ally; and the Afghan government is a mess. The Obama administration might get credit for withdrawing U.S. forces, but the situation in Afghanistan will be a disaster. Clear anarchy at best, and a Taliban reconquest at worst, will not make the Obama administration's Afghan policy look so good in future.

Egypt

The situation in Egypt is arguably the greatest single setback to U.S. interests since Iran's 1979 Revolution. In the first phase, the Obama administration strongly supported the overthrow of the long-allied Mubarak regime, trading this for an uncertain future. Thus, it lost the best U.S. partner in the Arabic-speaking world, a government that opposed revolutionary Islamism in general (and especially Hamas) along with Iranian ambitions.

The second phase seems likely to produce an anti-American government of fixed Islamist and radical nationalist views that is unlikely to support U.S. goals, likely to empty of content the Egypt-Israel peace (and conceivably go to war with Israel), and probably to become itself a supporter of anti-American and revolutionary Islamist forces in the region. It is difficult to conceive of a more total setback, yet the most basic points of the above analysis remain generally unrecognized in Washington.

Iran

After a long effort at engagement, which wasted time, the administration did finally support strong sanctions on Tehran in late 2010. The problem is that a number of loopholes were built in, which essentially excused China, Russia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates from having to implement the sanctions in practice. Moreover, while the administration was ostensibly tough on Iran's nuclear program,

it did not even seem to recognize Iran's strategic threat. That is, little was done to oppose the expansion of Iranian influence in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, or elsewhere. The principal Iranian challenge is through the use of backing revolutionary Islamist groups, covert warfare, funding, propaganda, and sponsoring terrorism—all elements to which the Obama administration has no serious response.

The Obama administration's concept of "containing" Iran almost exclusively focuses on preventing Iran from using nuclear weapons, a worthwhile endeavor but far from the entire picture. Moreover, despite some escalation of verbiage, the administration made no systematic effort to support the Iranian opposition. Thus, Iran's expanding power and influence was scarcely troubled by administration policy.

Iraq

Although the Obama administration's withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq makes sense on its own terms, in the context of a perceived weakening of American resolve and failure to confront Iran and other radical forces, it contributes to a sense in the region that—for allies—America is not reliable and—for enemies—that it is highly vulnerable. The Iraqi government is faction-ridden and plagued with internal problems. This, of course, is not the Obama administration's fault, but it makes the future of U.S.-Iraqi relations most insecure. While Iranian influence will not easily gain hegemony there, it is a serious competitor for the United States, especially if Iran seems to be the winning side in Gulf regional terms.

Israel

The best way to characterize U.S.-Israel relations during Obama's presidency is as relatively unchanged in material terms but very much undermined in terms of mutual trust and strategic cooperation. In other words, the bilateral military relationship has continued with little alteration and after all the storm and fury of administration rhetoric, there has been no real pressure on Israel or withdrawal of basic support. Still, the administration's obvious eagerness to distance itself from Israel and its lack of understanding of that country's needs reduce confidence in U.S. reliability. Specific mistaken U.S. policies have made Israeli leaders wary of trusting Obama, taking risks, or making concessions at his behest.

Ironically, Obama himself has been the greatest saboteur of an already stricken "peace process." His mistaken initial focus on the stopping of all construction on settlements, his refusal to criticize or pressure the Palestinian Authority, his ill-fated call for quick negotiations in the fall of 2009, and many other actions eliminated any possibility for negotiations. The truth is that Obama and his White House team have little understanding of the issues involved and none at all of Israeli interests and motivations. The administration made the greatest mistakes on these issues not only by having bad policies but in having policies that were so visibly mistaken and failed.

Gaza Strip

The Gaza Strip is one of the administration's greatest failures, though not one of the better understood ones. The policy of Israel, Egypt, and the Bush administration was to maintain pressure on the Gaza Strip to ensure that the Hamas regime remained weak and unstable, and thus less able to launch war on Israel or spread revolutionary Islamism. In addition, the idea was that a gap between a prosperous PA-ruled West Bank and a relatively impoverished Gaza Strip would increase popular support for the PA and decrease support for Hamas in both places.

The Obama administration trampled on this strategy. After the first Gaza flotilla, the administration could have done nothing. Instead, it handed the flotilla (and Hamas) a victory while getting nothing in exchange, by pressuring Israel to reduce sanctions on the Gaza Strip to a minimum. Then it paid hundreds of millions of dollars to the PA for use in subsidizing former PA employees in Gaza, an understandable step but a damaging one. Finally, by helping to bring down the Mubarak government, the White House guaranteed a pro-Hamas regime in Cairo and a virtually open border for shipping in weapons, money, and terrorists. By this behavior, the administration laid the foundation for a future Hamas-Israel, and possibly Egypt-Hamas versus Israel, war.

Lebanon

The deterioration of the political situation in Lebanon was not helped by the policy of the Bush administration in its latter years. Obama, however, made the situation much worse. Rather than back the moderate Sunni-Christian-Druze coalition, the administration followed a policy based on both non-intervention and a pro-Syrian stance. Despite some occasional statements, the U.S. government did nothing to stem a Hizballah-led, Syrian- and Iranian-backed takeover of the Beirut government.

The lack of U.S. support demoralized the moderate forces, while the openness of the U.S. government to Hizballah's empowerment was also most damaging. During Obama's watch, Lebanon has changed over to the anti-American, pro-Islamist bloc camp. Again, the administration does not even seem to comprehend the seriousness of the defeat there.

Libya

As with several other aspects of Obama administration policy, its dealings with Libya are close to being beyond belief. Frightened by the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, Libyan dictator Mu'amar Qadhafi was "scared straight," abandoned his nuclear program, and behaved himself internationally. Of course, there is no doubt that Qadhafi was a terrible dictator, yet the U.S. decision to back an unknown opposition in a civil war with NATO forces seemed precipitate to say the least. The fact that it was explicitly based on

“protecting civilians,” rather than on U.S. interests, was obviously arbitrary in terms of Middle East situations where this principle could have been better applied elsewhere.

Regarding Libya, the Obama administration made every mistake that its leaders and supporters had spent years criticizing when done by previous governments: a military intervention that had not been thought through, overstretching U.S. forces, and putting U.S. prestige into the hands of a questionable ally.

Muslim Brotherhood

One of the many remarkable shortcomings of Obama policy is its inability to figure out that the Muslim Brotherhood is an anti-American, revolutionary Islamist group that wants to wipe Israel off the map and transform Egypt into an Islamist state. To reach that conclusion did not seem the most difficult of tasks. Yet high administration officials asserted that the Brotherhood was moderate, nonviolent, non-Islamist, and even secular.

Before anyone even asked for his opinion, Obama declared early on in the revolution that the United States had no problem seeing the Brotherhood in government. In short, the administration took a major gamble on little intelligence that either the Brotherhood would not win elections or that if it did gain power, the group would be moderate. This could well turn out to be one of the greatest miscalculations in U.S. diplomatic history.

Palestinian Authority

The Palestinian Authority was discussed earlier under the Gaza Strip and Israel categories, but it should be added that the administration seemed totally incapable of dealing with PA intransigence. In fact, the White House intensified the problem. The PA refused to negotiate with Israel, rejected Obama’s public call for talks in late 2009, wasted the nine-month Israeli freeze on construction, broke its promise to Obama not to push for UN adoption of the Goldstone Report on Gaza, made a partnership deal with Hamas, and abandoned all of its previous commitments in order to push for unilateral independence without any prior deal with Israel. Yet none of these actions had the slightest effect on the administration’s virtually uncritical support for the PA.

Saudi Arabia

While Saudi Arabia is not an ideal society, it certainly has been an important U.S. ally for many years. The Obama administration virtually rubbed the monarchy’s face in the dirt—provoking the biggest rift in many

years—and hardly noticed that it was doing anything to create a problem. It did not back Saudi efforts to keep Lebanon from becoming a Syria-Iran satellite. Then it did not consult the Saudis over Egypt.

Indeed, from the tone of U.S. rhetoric, one might have concluded that the White House backed the overthrow of the Saudi monarchy. As if that were not enough the U.S. government did not make the Saudis feel that it was going to protect them from Iran. Finally, it at first advocated the overthrow of Bahrain's government, whose shortcomings in the treatment of the Shi'a majority did not outweigh the dangers of the country coming under the rule of an Iranian client regime. As a result, the Saudis—and the smaller Gulf states that had similar perceptions—intervened in Bahrain themselves; tried to develop their own ability to counter Iran; and drew another neglected and endangered moderate state, Jordan, under the protection of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Syria

Even in a list of remarkably bad policies, the Obama administration's approach to Syria stands out as especially misconceived. The idea that the United States would pull Syria away from Iran (a patron that backed its ambitions, lavishly subsidized Syria and Syria's clients, and provided it with both religious cover and strategic protection) was simply ludicrous, as if the Tehran regime had embarked on a high-priority effort to turn the United Kingdom or Canada from being U.S. allies to partners with Iran. Equally misconceived was the belief that the United States could moderate the most radical and anti-American of contemporary Arab regimes, which has behaved in that way because such a posture well served the regime's interests.

The Obama administration thus undid many of the Bush era sanctions while ignoring Syria's help to terrorists killing Americans in Iraq, backing for Hamas and Hizballah, efforts to seize control over Lebanon, sabotaging of the peace process, and other actions. Then, when the Syrian people revolted against the regime—at a time when the Obama administration had proclaimed a policy of promoting change and democracy—the U.S. government gave Syria an exemption and continued to support the dictatorship. It would be hard to imagine a policy more totally opposed to U.S. interests and sheer common sense.

Turkey

As in other cases, regarding Turkey, the Obama administration failed to perceive a major shift and thus developed a policy totally out of sync with the situation and contrary to U.S. interests. The Turkish regime, whatever the cleverness of its tactics and the patience of its progression, is an Islamist one. That government moved into alignment with Syria (at least before that country's upheaval) and Iran, while backing Hamas and Hizballah, and becoming passionately anti-Israel.

That regime also acted contrary to U.S. policy on a number of issues, noticeably trying to sabotage the U.S. sanctions effort against Iran. It also steadily diminished freedom of speech within Turkey and

arrested many critics. Yet despite some mention of the human rights issue, by mid-2011, the Obama administration acted as if nothing had changed and that Turkey was still a stalwart ally with no real problems in the relationship.

As the Turkish government whipped up anti-American fervor (and it is known—thanks to Wikileaks—that the U.S. embassy in Ankara was sending warnings to Washington), the U.S. government continued to be blithely ignorant about the danger. The administration constantly praised the Turkish regime—even holding it up as a model for Arabic-speaking states. This, of course, made the Turkish opposition feel betrayed and public opinion conclude that there was no cost for sticking a finger into America's eye.

WHAT HATH OBAMA WROUGHT?

To say that Obama policy in the Middle East has been disastrous is not a partisan or ideological statement but merely a recounting of the facts. The damage to U.S. interests and regional stability are perilous indeed and will take years to reverse—if in fact it can be reversed. Yet to focus on U.S.-Israel relations or on U.S. policy and the Israel-Palestinian conflict is to miss the main point. For all the drama and passion expended on those issues, they are essentially a sideshow. The real problem is the decline in the U.S. strategic position in the region, the failure to address the great conflict taking place in the region, the self-inflicted reduction of U.S. credibility and leverage, and even actions that have strengthened America's enemies.

None of the points made in this article are unknown in the Middle East. On the contrary, all of them are well understood both by America's worried friends and by its emboldened enemies. Of equal importance is the failure of the Obama administration to learn from its mistakes and experiences.

While many career officials in the State and Defense departments are aware of the mistaken conception and strategy, they are unable to affect policy except at the margins. The Defense Department and military commanders are forced to fight three wars simultaneously based on a strategy set by the White House, despite many misgivings. When Robert Gates was secretary of defense, until July 2011, he made clear his discontent with several aspects of policy—notably the Libyan war. His replacement by a politician close to Obama, Leon Panetta, removed that impediment to White House strategy.

Hillary Clinton, as secretary of state, also disagreed with aspects of Obama's policy and was seconded by career Middle East experts in the department. On two issues—White House support for the overturn of the governments in Bahrain and Egypt—the State Department and the president came into open disagreement. On Egypt, the State Department lost; on Bahrain it won after convincing the president that a revolution would increase Iranian influence and might lead to the closure of the U.S. naval base there.

The secretary of state is the president's former chief political rival and her own views have been repeatedly dismissed, thus making her into a cynical transmission belt for Obama's own views. Although much of State Department embassy reporting has been good, its points—for example, the threat from the Turkish regime—do not penetrate into the highest levels. Consequently, there is no place in the policy process from which corrective ideas can come.

Moreover, Obama's top tier of national security advisors on policy is extremely weak, further undermining a president with little knowledge of international affairs or the Middle East. The national security advisor is a political operative with no real authority or informed views. The first secretary of defense was a holdover from the Bush administration and did not enjoy the president's confidence, while his replacement is a former congressman with little knowledge of military or strategic affairs (except, perhaps, on budgetary issues).

Aside from Obama himself—who lacks experience on war-making, national administration, international affairs, and the Middle East—those who played the main role in policymaking were relatively junior staffers at the National Security Council. These individuals had little experience or knowledge in the region but deep-seated ideological premises based on theory and academic backgrounds. In contrast to some previous administrations, there was no strong national security advisor to advise the president and affect his views. Another important factor in shaping policy was the CIA, which advocated the view that only al-Qa'ida was a real threat and that dialogue with revolutionary Islamists was the correct approach, even before Obama's election. This view was also embodied in John Brennan, the president's advisor on terrorism, who was outspoken in his belief that befriending Islamists would moderate them.

A more detailed picture, of course, will have to await the availability of first-person memoirs on policymaking from inside the administration. Nevertheless, it is already apparent that four more years of the same policy is not something one wants to contemplate. A number of crisis scenarios based on the developments presented above would pose tremendous challenges to an administration ill-equipped by both ability and worldview to handle them.

**Barry Rubin is director of the [Global Research in International Affairs \(GLORIA\) Center](http://www.gloria-center.org), editor of the *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA) Journal*, and Middle East editor and a featured columnist at PajamasMedia <http://pajamasmedia.com/barryrubin/>. His latest books include *Israel: An Introduction* (Yale, 2012); *The Israel-Arab Reader (seventh edition)*, *The Long War for Freedom: The Arab Struggle for Democracy in the Middle East* (Wiley), and *The Truth About Syria* (Palgrave-Macmillan).*

NOTES

[1] This section is based on a thorough reading of statements by President Barack Obama and administration officials as well as documents and actions. Many examples are provided by the current author's writings during the period since the administration took office.

[2] This author anticipated the challenges and responses of the Obama Administration in an article written just as he was taking office. More than two years later, this analysis looks quite accurate on both counts. See Barry Rubin, "U.S. Middle East Policy: Too Many Challenges and yet a Single Theme," *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA) Journal*, June 2009, <http://www.gloria-center.org/2009/06/rubin-2009-06-03/>.

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