

# Obama's False Hope: Why I will not Vote for Obama

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At what point does an individual stop supporting the lesser of two evils? The question became particularly important this primary race, as one man ascended to political stardom ostensibly breaking free from the evils of mainstream politics and creating a platform based on hope and change. This transcendent figure is presidential hopeful Barack Obama.

Searching for substantive policy, I began to chip away at Obama's political posturing, and came to a daunting conclusion: there are a multitude of reasons one shouldn't vote for Barack Obama, especially those within the Arab-American community.

Senator Obama is not anti-war, nor does he genuinely seek appropriate alternatives to militarism in the Middle East. Arab-Americans and putative leftists naively, and sometimes willfully, overlook the fact that he is an ardent supporter of the invasion, bombing, and ongoing occupation of Afghanistan. One also cannot dismiss that his views are consistent with the Democratic Party platform, which aspires to refocus on Afghanistan. Such views bode well with Obama's plan to deploy additional troops and increase funding, but as with the case in Iraq, it will only intensify the struggles of the civilian population of Afghanistan. Obama fully supported the Lebanon war (even as the Israeli military killed hundreds of Lebanese civilians and leveled civilian infrastructure with tens of thousands of US-shipped cluster bombs), and played up his pro-Israel rhetoric nearly as much as his current democratic opponent, Hilary Clinton. As with nearly every other candidate, Obama fully supports Israel's 40 year occupation of Palestinian land and dutifully endorsed the besiegement of Gaza. Surprisingly, this is a politician who *once* carried favor with prominent members of the Palestinian community, attending a community fundraiser in which Edward Said was the keynote speaker, dining with Rashid Khalidi in Chicago, and receiving praise from Ali Abuminah during his time as a state senator. Domestically, his shift to the right is glaringly apparent, reflecting weaker stances on undocumented residents, the patriot act, gay rights, and a host of other domestic issues.

Obama may have voiced opposition to the Iraq war five years ago, but his "courage" came at a time when it minimally affected his political aspirations. Since entering the senate, he has voted in favor of nearly 300 billion dollars in war appropriations and will continue to appropriate billions more if elected president. Obama is already playing up his ability to be hawkish on foreign policy (e.g. his illustrious declaration that he'd bomb Pakistan on "actionable intelligence") and has tried to validate himself as a "tough when necessary" type of leader.

Post-911, inexperience with foreign affairs has been a sore point for all democrats. There is nothing more troubling than a field of candidates trying to prove themselves to their opposition. One only needs to look at the rise of Amir Peretz as Defense Minister in Israel. He was a well-known leftist against the Israeli occupation before coming into office. In an

attempt to demonstrate his intestinal fortitude and establish himself among the Israeli public, he championed the destruction of Lebanon, and defended the decision as fervently as any right-wing activist. At best, Obama's inexperience will limit his capacity to control the military occupation of Iraq, as it would every democrat and most republicans during the inaugural year. Additionally, expectation for his vaguely outlined phased withdrawal, which creeps well into midterm election campaigning, further denies the mechanics of mainstream American politics and Congressional trepidation. No democrat or republican can afford to lose seats in the house and senate; it's precisely why little is achieved during election years. Potential voters may find it useful to recall the excitement engendered after the 2006 midterm elections when a pullout was "imminent;" assurances were given that mass hearings would take place on Capitol Hill, and accountability was declared to be the wave of the future. Predictably, campaigning supplanted accountability, while the people of Iraq were left hanging in the balance. Ultimately, no viable political candidate will be able to pull out of Iraq before the 2010 elections.

Contrary to public perception, Obama is not a humanitarian. He consistently places the onus of solving the conflict in Iraq on the Iraqi people alone, absolving the US of its responsibility for an illegal invasion and occupation. Nor does he support a sustainable future for the Iraqi people or their right to reparations; rather, he supports an eventual end to the war primarily to alleviate America's financial and militaristic burden. His position illustrates a profound difference between a humanistic and militaristic approach to Iraq, the latter of which will have a dramatic negative effect on Iraq's civilian population. Moreover, Obama squarely blames Iraqis for their own misery, focusing little attention on the US campaign. The incessant mantra that Iraqis refuse to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and accept democracy ignores a simple reality: it was never presented to them in the first place, nor has there been a serious attempt to rebuild Iraq infrastructurally or economically.

Arab-Americans should not be confused. No matter how appetizing the Bobby Kennedy-style rhetoric and charismatic speeches may be, if our community keeps acquiescing to the status quo, it will never change. We must begin building solid coalitions with other groups that face similar challenges (i.e. the Latino and African-American community), or our small vote will amount to little more than election-time pandering. Unfortunately, organizational work and outreach is in its infancy stages. Many of the organizations that purportedly speak for us have become part of the system, consequently stripping away their constituents of their legitimate demands. Furthermore, our community has become enthralled with general election politics, but it isn't sufficiently focused on working at the state and local levels, where we can have the most impact. Barack Obama may lend more support to our issues than Mike Huckabee, but if our community starts supporting candidates who do not recognize our plight (as well as the plight of other minority groups) our community at home and our families abroad will suffer for endorsing him.

One question still remains: which viable candidate is left to vote for? Unfortunately, in its existing capacity, our vote isn't strong enough to make a *viable* impact. Reaching out to prospective candidates can be effective, but it must be coupled with a plan to comprehensively inform the field of where we stand on the issues. Enthusiastically endorsing candidates who refuse to appreciate our concerns is a fundamentally flawed approach. If the system is broken and the game of Washington politics is corrupt, then playing it with a weak hand only strengthens that system. The naysayer will proclaim that our votes count in swing states. Yet, if this was truly the case, our vote would be coveted, not ignored. No viable candidate on either side of the aisle even bothered to show up to the

Arab-American Institute's National Leadership Conference in Michigan, where the largest portion of our constituency resides.

Our current predicament underscores the limitation of the two-party system: small voices have no voices. The only way to build a better future for the Arab-American community and positively impact policy toward the Arab world is to invest in ourselves, and begin to build coalitions, where smaller voices can come together to effectively change society. This method will legitimately allow us to empower ourselves without acceding to a blind principled stance. We can't just hope for a better future; we have to work for it, and sadly, the empty rhetoric spewed by Barack Obama, and the rest of the mainstream candidates, only serve to solidify our problems in perpetuity. So, Yalla Vote! But do it in good conscience, and in a way that makes sense for our community.

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