

U.S Must Work Harder To Win Over ARAB Regimes On ISIS

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The US administration is trying to convince its populace and the world that it is successfully [forging a new alliance](#) in the Middle East in order to combat the [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant](#) (known as Isis). What Americans tend to forget so easily, however, is that the US is distrusted, disliked and even hated by all the regimes it is dealing with and even more so by millions in the Arab street.

Nobody has forgotten America's failures in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, its abandonment of the region after the failures of the Arab uprisings and the millions of refugees and homeless those failed wars have spawned. Arab leaders and their regimes cultivate long memories as much as they do conspiracy theories.

Recall that just a few weeks ago Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states were furious at Washington for cozying up to Iran; and for abandoning [Iraq](#), leaving the Shia regime of former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in power to taunt the Sunni population. This is the situation from which arose widespread Sunni support for Isis.

They were also furious at the US for refusing to be more assertive in unseating President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, who had become a proxy of Iran. Furthermore, they were angry at America for allowing Gaza to be destroyed by Israel. That is a long list of grievances, and none of which the US has explained or apologized for - nor does it even think it deserves blame. But the Arabs do not forget slights.

The new Egyptian regime of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi will not forget that the US was cultivating its sworn enemy, the Muslim Brotherhood - which formed a now-deposed elected government - until a few months ago. Turkey refuses to trust the Americans after they refused to do more to end the Assad regime in Syria.

Libyans - one cannot speak of a government there - are livid at the half-baked support given by the US to bomb Muammer Gaddafi's forces and then walking away from the ensuing civil war. For the US the issue is the 2012 murder of its ambassador in Benghazi not the collapse of the nation. Jordan and Lebanon are facing direct threats from Isis at their border crossings with Iraq, and they do not trust the US to do anything about it.

Meanwhile on the Muslim street, from Tunisia to Pakistan, everyone believes the US cultivated, supported and backed Isis just as they believe it did al-Qaeda before September 11 2001. Of course, such conspiracy theories are not true - but then let us have US President Barack Obama explain and apologize to Arab governments about why he failed to heed months of CIA intelligence reports about the growth of Isis; why he uncritically allowed the former Iraqi regime of Mr. Maliki to continue for so long, which was the real catalyst for Isis advances in Iraq; and why the Americans have done so little to help non-Muslim minorities such as Christians to survive.

This history explains why Arab states have offered only tepid support for the US plan to overthrow Isis and for Secretary of State John Kerry's trip around the region. The statement by 10 Arab states in Jeddah pledging to join the US-led military campaign offers little by way of specifics such as troop numbers, use of their massive air forces or money. In fact, they offered nothing except to allow training camps for anti-Assad fighters, which have long existed anyway.

That is not to say that the Arab regimes are not fearful of Isis. They would like to see it defeated because they know that, after Syria and Iraq, they are next on the Isis list to be conquered and included into the so-called caliphate. Yet they do not trust the Americans to sustain the long-running military and political campaign that is needed because Washington's policies are so fickle. Worst of all, the US refuses any kind of accountability for its past mistakes in the region.

Britain and other European partners who join the US-led alliance must insist that the Obama administration first offers Arab states explanations for its failures and then visibly demonstrates that it is there for the long haul. Anything less than that will only feed Isis propaganda and possible further victories, while fuelling conspiracy theories about US will and intent, demoralizing Arabs and Muslims everywhere.

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