

Grading Obama

After U.S. President Barack Obama's first 100 days in office, **Foreign Policy** asked a group of experts to grade him on everything from North Korea to nukes. On the anniversary of his historic election, we've reprised the experiment -- and found out that the White House isn't doing so well.

NOVEMBER 2, 2009



Geneive Abdo

Grade: C+ and declining

Having just returned from two weeks of meetings in the Middle East, I think it is clear that the rhetoric in the United States, applauding Obama's outreach to Iran and the Muslim world, is not broadly shared by the people he is trying to impress. The Israelis think his Cairo speech is giving Iran a free pass to do whatever it pleases because Tehran does not fear a military attack from the United States. The Lebanese think the Obama administration's reconciliation with Syria, coupled with Iran's growing militarization, makes the Hezbollah problem more of a menace. Iran's arms shipment to Hezbollah can only be stopped, they say, if the Syrians agree to close their borders to these shipments. But without pressure from Obama, this is unlikely to happen.

And Muslims in general are no longer impressed with the Cairo speech because they do not see any policy changes as a result of this gesture. Israel has refused to freeze settlement expansion; Obama has cut direct funding to help civil society groups in countries such as Egypt; and there is no engagement with Islamist leaders who represent the vast majority of Muslims in the Arab world.

The Obama appeal? It is fading fast.

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Ted Galen Carpenter

Overall grade: C

Grading a president's foreign policy after only nine months in office is an inherently tentative and speculative enterprise. But President Barack Obama has taken enough actions to warrant at least preliminary grades in several categories.

Iraq: a gentleman's C. He has continued the policy of a phased withdrawal of U.S. troops agreed to by

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and President George W. Bush during the final months of the Bush administration. A faster withdrawal would be advisable, but at least the United States appears to be on its way out of that unnecessary and mismanaged war.

Afghanistan: F. The president was too hasty with his initial decision to send additional troops. He is now in danger of compounding that error by agreeing to Gen. Stanley McChrystal's plan to send even more troops. The United States has drifted into an open-ended nation-building mission in an extremely unpromising arena. By escalating the U.S. commitment, Obama is moving in precisely the wrong direction.

Iran: B. Obama had the courage to reach out to Iran. Only time will tell whether his diplomatic initiatives will get positive results, but his effort to date is superior to the bankrupt policies of previous administrations. At least there are now promising talks on the thorny nuclear issue.

East Asia: C. The president has avoided doing anything rash with regard to the North Korean nuclear problem. On the other hand, he has done little to get Japan and South Korea to become more serious about their own defenses and stop free-riding on U.S. security efforts. Relations with China remain reasonably cordial, though the president's imposition of tariff duties on Chinese tires was a needless affront.

Russia: C. Obama abandoned the unnecessary and provocative missile defense plan with Poland and the Czech Republic. However, he has not abandoned the even more unnecessary and provocative goal of expanding NATO to include Ukraine and Georgia.

Repairing the United States' reputation in the world: A. This least tangible, but extremely important, aspect of the Obama administration's foreign policy might be his principal achievement.

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