

# How Lady Gaga Explains Middle-East Conflict

By *MAX FISHER* on *April 01, 2010 11:45am*

When the Wall Street Journal's [Bret Stephens coyly suggested](#) that Lady Gaga was to blame for anti-American Islamic extremism, he was really making a broader point. Dancing, skin-baring pop stars like Lady Gaga signify the Western decadence that, he argued, is a far greater driver of Islamic terrorist recruitment than the Israel-Palestine conflict. Think-tanker [Andrew Exum pushed back](#), noting that popular Arab pop stars are just as scantily clad as America's. Now, more foreign policy experts are weighing in, and Stephens has written a follow-up, all exploring how American culture in general and Lady Gaga in particular explain, or don't explain, anti-Americanism.

- **It's About The Culture Clash** Defending against his critics, [Bret Stephens writes](#) that, as the Muslim world gradually opens to Western media and culture, those transformations are causing internal turmoil, which is the real cause of anti-American rage. However, "the sensual currents of Western life exert a constant and ineradicable attraction, even as they also provoke censorious and violent reactions. If America wants to tilt the balance of Muslim sentiment in its favor, it needs to stand up for its principles, its liberties and its friends--Israel, Playboy and Lady Gaga included."
- **Fixing Gaga vs. Settlements** Foreign Policy's [Daniel Drezner gives](#) Bret Stephens the benefit of the doubt. What if American culture really incited more rage than Israel-Palestine? "If that's true, from a policy perspective, which issue should the United States prioritize?" he asks. Do you censor all of American media or just push for an Israel-Palestine peace settlement? "If you were offering the president advice among these policy options, which one would you say yields the greatest gain for the least cost to the United States?" Obviously, he suggests, the latter.
- **Al-Qaeda Decried Booty-Shaking?** Cato's [Justin Logan dryly notes](#) that al-Qaeda makes its agenda quite clear. "Bin Laden's 1996 fatwa, after all, was not titled 'Declaration of War against the Americans with their Supple Buttocks and Protuberant Breasts.' Instead, it was called 'Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places.'" Those two places are holy sites in Saudi Arabia. Logan cites formal studies showing that most Arabs (if not all Muslims) are angry at the U.S. for its foreign policy, not its domestic culture.
- **What Jihadists Really Care About** Foreign Policy's [Thomas Hegghammer reads](#) the terrorist literature and finds no evidence to support Stephens.

*How do we know that Palestine is more important than Westernization for the anti-American jihadists? First, al Qaeda's leaders have spoken more often [about Palestine and other political issues \(pdf\)](#) than about moral corruption. Second, when al Qaeda recruits cite their reasons for joining, they more often mention Palestine, Chechnya, and other political issues [\(pdf\)](#) than they do examples of Westernization. Third, incidents of anti-American violence and vandalism in the Middle East have tended to [increase during or shortly after dramatic events in Palestine](#). Fourth, recruitment to al Qaeda has tended to [expand during or shortly after escalation of hostilities in Palestine](#).*

*Fifth, al Qaeda militants are happy to embrace aspects of Western culture when it suits them -- witness the use of videos and music in jihadi propaganda -- and they are arguably more pragmatic about matters moral and ritual than many other Islamists.*

- **Why No Anti-Marilyn Monroe Attacks in 1950s?** Conservative blogger [Daniel Larison](#) [looks at the timeline](#). If they hate us for our decadent culture, why did they show such indifference to four decades of skin-flashing stars like Marilyn Monroe? "In fact, attacks on Americans and American installations began after we inserted ourselves into the region's conflicts and began establishing a military presence there. [...] Anti-American jihadist violence did not occur until the misguided 1982-83 intervention in Lebanon."

## The Debate

- [Indonesian Playboy 46](#) [Bret Stephens](#), The Wall Street Journal
- [Lady Gaga vs Occupation](#) [Thomas Hegghammer](#), Foreign Policy
- [Hating Our Degeneracy](#) [Daniel Larison](#), American Conservative
- [Sophistry](#) [Justin Logan](#), Cato Institute
- [Gaga and National Security](#) [Daniel Drezner](#), Foreign Policy

---

*Copyright © 2009 by The Atlantic Monthly Group. All rights reserved.*