

Questions to ask President Obama Regarding Bashar Al Assad and the Islamic State (ISIS) at a Press Conference

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[William Blum](#) 6 December 2015

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

GR Editor' Note: These are relevant questions formulated by author William Blum, to be addressed to president Obama at a hypothetical press conference. These are the questions being addressed by the US media

Which is most important to you – destroying ISIS, overthrowing Syrian president Assad, or scoring points against Russia?

Do you think that if you pointed out to the American people that Assad has done much more to aid and rescue Christians in the Middle East conflicts than any other area leader that this would lessen the hostility the United States public and media feel toward him? Or do you share the view of the State Department spokesperson who declared in September that “The Assad regime frankly is the root of all evil”?

Why does the United States maintain crippling financial sanctions and a ban on military aid to Syria, Cuba, Iran and other countries but not to Saudi Arabia?

What does Saudi Arabia have to do to lose its strong American support? Increase its torture, beheadings, amputations, whippings, stonings, punishment for blasphemy and apostasy, or forced marriages and other oppression of women and girls? Increase its financial support for ISIS and other jihadist groups? Confess to its role in 9-11? Attack Israel?

What bothers you more: The Saudi bombing of the people of Yemen or the Syrian bombing of the people of Syria?

Does the fact that ISIS never attacks Israel raise any question in your mind?

Does it concern you that Turkey appears to be more intent upon attacking the Kurds and the Russians than attacking ISIS? And provides medical care to wounded ISIS soldiers? Or that ISIS deals its oil on Turkish territory? Or that NATO-member Turkey has been a safe haven for terrorists from Libya, Chechnya, Qatar, and elsewhere? Or that last year Vice President Biden stated that Turkish president Erdogan’s regime was backing ISIS with “hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of tons of weapons”?

If NATO had never existed, what argument could you give today in favor of creating such an institution? Other than – as some would say – being a very useful handmaiden of US foreign policy and providing American arms manufacturers with trillions of dollars of guaranteed sales.

Does the United States plan on releasing any of its alleged evidence to back up its repeated claims of Syrian bombing and chemical warfare against the Syrian people? Like clear photos or videos from the omnipresent American satellite cameras? Or any other credible evidence?

Does the United States plan on releasing any of its alleged evidence to back up its repeated claims of Russian invasions of Ukraine in the past year? Like clear photos or videos from the omnipresent American satellite cameras? Or any other credible evidence?

Do the numerous connections between the Ukrainian government and neo-Nazis have any effect upon America's support of Ukraine?

What do you imagine would have been the outcome in World War Two if the United States had opposed Soviet entry into the war because "Stalin must go"?

Would you prefer that Russia played no military role at all in Syria?

Can the administration present in person a few of the Syrian opposition "moderates" we've heard so much about and allow the media to interview them?

Have you considered honoring your promise of "No boots on the ground in Syria" by requiring all American troops to wear sneakers?

Excerpts from a State Department daily press briefing, November 24, 2015, following the Turkish shoot-down of a Russian plane, conducted by Mark Toner, Deputy Spokesperson:

QUESTION: President Obama said he will reach out to President Erdogan over the next few days.

MR TONER: Yeah.

QUESTION: Did not mention Putin. That really puts you squarely on Turkey's side, doesn't it?

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QUESTION: You're saying Turkey has the right to defend itself; President Obama said the same thing. What defense are you talking about? Does anyone think Russia was going to attack Turkey?

MR TONER: Again, I mean, this is -

QUESTION: Do you think so?

MR TONER: Look, I don't want to parse out this incident. I said very clearly that we don't know all the facts yet, so for me to speak categorically about what happened is - frankly, would be irresponsible.

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QUESTION: Even if you accept the Turkish version that the plane traveled 1.3 miles inside Turkey and violated its airspace for 17 seconds - that's according to Turkey - do you think shooting down the plane was the right thing to do?

MR TONER: Again, I'm not going to give you our assessment at this point. We're still gathering the facts.

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QUESTION: In 2012, Syria shot down a Turkish plane that reportedly strayed into its territory. Prime Minister Erdogan then said, "A short-term border violation can never be a pretext for an attack." Meanwhile, NATO has expressed its condemnation of Syria's attack as well as strong support for Turkey. Do you see the inconsistency of NATO's response on this?

MR TONER: As to what President Erdogan may have said after that incident, I would refer you to him.

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QUESTION: Turkoman forces in Syria said they killed the two Russian pilots as they descended in parachutes.

MR TONER: Yeah.

QUESTION: Turkoman forces are supported by Turkey and are fighting against the Syrian Government, they are part of the rebel force there. Do you consider these rebels to be a moderate force in Syria?

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QUESTION: I'm trying - I mean, do you think that everybody has the right to defend themselves?

MR TONER: We've said very clearly that people have the right to defend themselves.

QUESTION: Right? Including the Assad regime?

MR TONER: No.

Is it terrorism or is it religion? Does the question matter?

From the early days of America's War on Terror, and even before then, I advocated seeing terrorists as more than just mindless, evil madmen from another planet. I did not believe they were motivated by hatred or envy of American freedom or democracy, or of American wealth, secular government, or culture, although George W. Bush dearly wanted us to believe that. The terrorists were, I maintained, driven by decades of terrible things done to their homelands by US foreign policy. There should be no doubt of this I wrote, for there are numerous examples of Middle East terrorists explicitly citing American policies as the prime motivation behind their actions. And it worked the same all over the world. In the period of the 1950s to the 1980s in Latin America, in response to a long string of outrageous Washington interventions, there were countless acts of terrorism against US diplomatic and military targets as well as the offices of US corporations. 9/11 was a globalized version of the Columbine High School disaster. When you bully people long enough they are going to strike back.

In 2006 Osama bin Laden was inspired to tell Americans to read my book *Rogue State* because it contained the following and other similar thoughts of mine: "If I were the president, I could stop terrorist attacks against the United States in a few days. Permanently. I would first apologize – very publicly and very sincerely – to all the widows and the orphans, the impoverished and the tortured, and all the many millions of other victims of American imperialism."

So does this mean that I support ISIS?

Absolutely not. I think they're one of the most disgusting collection of supposed humans in all of history. But I'm surprised at how often those who are highly critical of them, and supportive of the movement to defeat them, are very reluctant to denounce ISIS as a *religious* force; this, apparently, would be politically incorrect. Shortly after the terrible November 13 events in Paris I was watching the French English-language TV station *France 24*, which presented a round-table discussion of what happened in Paris amongst four or five French intellectual types. Not one of them expressed a negative word about Islam; it was all sociology, politics, economics, psychology, history, Western oppression, etc., etc. Hadn't any of them ever heard any of the perpetrators or their supporters cry out "Allahu Akbar"?

I then read a detailed review of an article by Thomas Piketty, the French author of the much-acclaimed 700-page opus *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, the international best-seller of last year. According to the review in *Le Monde*, Piketty said that inequality is a major driver of Middle Eastern terrorism, including the Paris attacks, and that Western nations have themselves largely to blame for that inequality. Terrorism that is rooted in inequality, he maintains, is best combatted economically. Not a word about Muhammad in the 7th century, Sharia Law in the 21st century, or anything in between.

Next, by contrast, we turn to an interview with Mizanur Rahman, one of social media's most famous promoters of the Islamic State, whom Britain and the US consider to be a recruiter for ISIS. British authorities closely monitor his movements and have taken his passport. He wears a court-mandated electronic ankle bracelet.

Rahman is known for his thousands of tweets and Facebook posts, and fiery lectures on YouTube, intended to inspire vulnerable young people. He openly advocates for a global caliphate, a homeland ruled by Islamic sharia law, which he says is a superior political, legal and economic system to democracy. The Islamic State's black flag will one day fly over the White House he insists, adding that the militants will probably conquer Washington by military force, but he watches his words carefully to avoid being accused of advocating violence. Still, he argues, the concept of spreading Islam by force is no less honorable than Western countries invading Iraq or Afghanistan to spread democracy. [I wonder if he really believes that Western foreign policy has anything to do with spreading democracy.]

Rahman called last month's Islamic State attacks in Paris "an inevitable consequence" of French participation in coalition airstrikes against the militants' *de facto* capital in Raqqa, Syria. "I don't think anybody should really be surprised at what happened," he said. "In war, people bomb each other. I think it's an opportunity for the French people to empathize with the people in Raqqa, who suffer very similar impact whenever the French airstrikes hit them – the civilian casualties, the shock, the stress. The anger that they must be feeling toward the Islamic State right now is the same kind of anger that the people of Iraq and Syria feel towards France."

He argues that it is no worse for the Islamic State to behead American journalists than for the United States to kill Muslim civilians in drone strikes. "I'm promoting sharia because I think it's the best," Rahman, a former accountant and web designer, said in the London coffee shop interview. "I think it is better than what we have, and what is wrong with saying that?" [Nothing unless you enjoy music, sex, and alcohol and find praying five times a day highly oppressive.)

In August, Rahman was charged in Britain with "inviting support" for the Islamic State, and he faces up to 10 years in prison if convicted. He is free on bail under strict conditions, including the ankle bracelet.

Rahman called the allegations against him ridiculous and anti-Muslim persecution. He said that he has done nothing more than preach the virtues of Islam and that he has never specifically recruited anyone to join the Islamic State or urged anyone to commit violence.

"Islam is more than just a book with an old story. It's actually a code for life," he said, adding that Islam is a blueprint for everything from personal hygiene to international relations. "It's not just some medieval rantings."

Rahman's first arrest was in February 2002, when he was fined 50 pounds for defacing posters for a pop band that featured scantily clad women, something he considered indecent. [But forcing women to walk around fully covered from head to toe, with only their eyes showing, is not indecent? And what woman in the entire world would dress like that without great pressure from a male-dominated society?]

Peter Neumann, head of the International Center for the Study of Radicalization at King's College in London stated that Rahman is skilled at persuading Muslims that it is their religious obligation to swear allegiance to the Islamic State leader, arguing that God wants the world united under a caliphate, without ever overtly calling for them to move to Syria or Iraq. [How, we must ask, does Rahman know what God wants? There are countless individuals all over the world confined to institutions for committing violence which, they insisted, was in response to God talking to them.]

The couple in California ... The only explanation my poor pagan mind can offer for their unspeakable behavior is "martyrdom". They knew that their action would, in all likelihood, result in their death and they believed what they had been taught – oh so profoundly taught in the Kuran and drummed into their heads elsewhere like only religion can – that for martyrs there are heavenly rewards in the afterlife ... forever.

With or without religion, good people will do good things and bad people will do bad things. But for good people to do bad things – that takes religion. Steven Weinberg, Nobel Prize-winning physicist

Notes

1. [U.S. Department of State Daily Press Briefing](#), November 24, 2015
2. *Washington Post*, December 1, 2015, p.A11
3. *Washington Post*, November 23, 2015

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