



Analysis of Select New Leadership of the 112th Congress

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As expected, the midterm elections earlier this month yielded major gains for the Republican Party in both the House and Senate. Republicans won control of the House of Representatives with a net gain of 61 seats thus far, and Democrats barely retained control of the Senate.

On November 17, both the Republican and Democratic caucuses met to elect their leadership for the 112th Congress. With current Minority Leader John Boehner (R-Ohio) as Speaker of the House and his Republican colleagues taking on committee chairmanships, there is little doubt that we will see a shift in policy priorities and actions in the next two years.

This report provides context for understanding the new Congress and what it can mean for Arab Americans and our concerns. We hope this information proves helpful as you engage policymakers on key foreign and domestic concerns during the 112th Congress.

HOUSE LEADERSHIP

Current Democratic Leadership

Speaker of the House: Rep. Nancy Pelosi (CA)
Majority Leader: Rep. Steny Hoyer (MD)

Incoming Republican Leadership

Speaker of the House: Rep. John Boehner (OH)
Majority Leader: Rep. Eric Cantor (VA)

CONGRESSMAN JOHN BOEHNER

Congressman Boehner was first elected to Congress in 1990. He quickly became a standout as one of the “Gang of Seven,” a group of freshmen Republicans who relentlessly pursued the ethical abuses then plaguing the House of Representatives, including the House banking and post office scandals. One of the authors of the Contract with America, Boehner’s rise in prominence continued when he was elected Conference Chair after the Republican House upset of 1994. He served in that role until a caucus shakeup in 1998, returning to the leadership in 2006 when he was elected Minority Leader.

Like current Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Boehner cosponsored legislation that supported Israel’s *Operation Cast Lead* in Gaza as legitimate self-defense, supported a resolution which described the Goldstone report (documenting the atrocities committed during the operation) as biased and called for its dismissal, and voted to extend the PATRIOT Act without the reforms needed to better protect our civil rights and liberties. In addition, Boehner voted to support Israel’s attack on the humanitarian flotilla en route to Gaza as legitimate self-defense. He also supported a bill that sought to reduce assistance to and designate as “terrorist” governments and entities that are associated with satellite companies that made certain channels available.¹

¹ *Congressional Scorecard – 111th Congress – Arab American Institute*

Recently, Boehner described the Arab world as a sea of oppression and hate in which Israel is an island of freedom. He criticized President Obama for seemingly placing “equal blame on the Israelis and the Palestinians,” saying Israel has a right to defend itself and should not be placed “into the same playpen with terrorists.”²

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

Israel is “an island of freedom surrounded by a sea of oppression and hate.”³

CONGRESSMAN ERIC CANTOR

Eric Cantor (R-VA) joined the House of Representatives in 2001. He had been in office only two years when he was appointed Chief Deputy Republican Whip, and was elected Republican Minority Whip in 2008. His tenure in Congress has reflected unwavering support for Israel, a position he is expected to continue as Majority Leader. As Majority Leader in the 112th Congress, Cantor will be the second highest-ranking Republican, making him the highest-ranking Jewish member in the history of Congress. Cantor is one of three top leaders of the “Young Guns,” a group of conservative Republicans critical of Bush era spending who many expect to effectively challenge the establishment GOP leadership.

As Majority Leader, Cantor will have a profound influence on the direction of U.S. foreign policy, particularly in the arena of U.S. assistance to Israel. Cantor ranked on top of *Foreign Policy* magazine’s recently-released list of the ten most powerful Republicans who will assume control and influence U.S. foreign policy in the 112th Congress.⁴ In one of his most bold pro-Israeli moves, Cantor recently proposed creating a separate account for foreign aid to Israel instead of having Israel’s allocation as part of the annual foreign aid bill. Critics denounced Cantor’s proposal as a political avenue for Republicans to dispute the foreign aid budget without impacting aid to Israel.⁵

Perhaps the best indication of the role he intends to play with regard to Israel is demonstrated in remarks he made *after* the midterm elections regarding his meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. In the official readout of the meeting, Cantor’s office said the Congressman understands the “special relationship between Israel and the United States,” and that House Republicans will be serving as a “check” on President Obama’s policy.⁶

In the aftermath of the recent border conflict between the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the Israeli military, Cantor proposed cutting aid to the LAF. He also proposed a bill to end aid to the Palestinian Authority on the basis that it promotes a “culture of hate.”⁷ A harsh critic of President Obama’s Middle East policy, Cantor described the President’s approach to Israel as “bogus,” and referred to Obama’s Cairo speech as a way to “apologize on behalf of America.” He has also criticized Obama’s effort to restore diplomatic ties with Syria and described Obama’s decision to

² *CNN Political Ticker* (6/4/2009)

³ *Los Angeles Times* (8/31/2010)

⁴ *Foreign Policy* (10/25/2010)

⁵ *Washington Post* (10/26/2010)

⁶ *Politico* (11/11/2010)

⁷ *Israel Project* (11/20/2010)

eliminate the language of “war on terror” and “radical Islam” from U.S. foreign policy as “self-flagellation.”⁸

Domestically, Cantor voted in favor of having the Patriot Act become permanent and strongly opposed the construction of the Park 51 Islamic Center in New York, describing it as “the ultimate insensitivity.”⁹

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

“I think that is the ultimate insensitivity. Anyone looking at that with any common sense would say, ‘what in the world would be doing fostering some type of system that would let this happen.’ Everybody knows America's built on the rights of free expression, the rights to practice your faith, but come on. The World Trade Centers were brought down by Islamic extremists, uh, radicals who were bent on killing Americans and accomplished that in unimaginable ways. I think it is the height of insensitivity, uh, and unreasonableness to allow for the construction of a mosque on the site of the World Trade Center bombings. I mean, come on.”¹⁰

From official congressional office readout of meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu: *“Eric stressed that the new Republican majority will serve as a check on the Administration and what has been, up until this point, one party rule in Washington. He made clear that the Republican majority understands the special relationship between Israel and the United States, and that the security of each nation is reliant upon the other.”¹¹*

HOUSE COMMITTEE AND SUBCOMMITTEE LEADERSHIP

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Current Chairman: Rep. Howard Berman (D-CA)
Incoming Chairwoman: Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL)

ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) shares some similar voting patterns with current Chair Howard Berman, but she is less likely to compromise on her positions with the Obama Administration, and is expected to serve as an obstruction to Obama’s foreign policy priorities. She is a stalwart supporter of AIPAC who has led numerous efforts to block assistance to Palestine, alter the Egyptian assistance formula and impair other US aid programs to the region.

⁸ *Politico* (5/4/2010)

⁹ *National Review Online* (8/11/2010)

¹⁰ *Ibid*

¹¹ *Politico* (11/11/2010)

While previously Ros-Lehtinen said the military option with respect to Iran was “probably off the table,”¹² she recently invoked a Chamberlain/Hitler analogy and stated that the “U.S. must be prepared to act alone, if necessary, and bring every weapon in its arsenal to bear” to stop Iran’s nuclear program.¹³

Among her anti-Palestinian efforts, Ros-Lehtinen circulated a “Dear Colleague” letter this summer seeking to have the PLO expelled from US soil, and the US Embassy immediately relocated to Jerusalem. This came shortly after issuing a press release criticizing the Obama administration for a symbolic upgrade in the status of the PLO office in Washington.¹⁴ Last year, she introduced a bill that sought to “defund and shut down Palestinian-related UN organizations (including UNRWA)”.¹⁵ Like incoming Speaker Boehner, she supported a bill that sought to reduce assistance to and designate as “terrorist,” governments and entities that are associated with satellite companies that made certain channels available.¹⁶

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

“What’s wrong with this picture? Abu Mazen refuses to negotiate directly with Israel, instead praising the recently-deceased mastermind of the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre and sending condolences to his relatives. But the U.S. rewards his corrupt, autocratic PLO with more symbols of legitimacy, treating it like a sovereign state. On the other hand, Israel continues to be an indispensable democratic ally - but the U.S. still refuses to move our embassy to Israel’s chosen capital. Instead of giving more undeserved gifts to the PLO, it’s time for us to kick the PLO out of the U.S. once and for all, and move our embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, where it belongs”¹⁷

On the Obama Administration’s decision to send Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf on a State Department mission to the Middle East: *“This radical is a terrible choice to be one of the faces of our country overseas. The USA should be using public diplomacy programs to combat extremism, not to endorse it.”¹⁸*

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

Current Chairman: Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-NY)

Incoming Chairman: Rep. Dan Burton (R-IN)

DAN BURTON

Congressman Dan Burton of Indiana will become the chair of the Subcommittee on the Middle East. He has consistently voted to defend Israel’s conduct in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including its 2008/2009 assault on Gaza, and its deadly raid on the humanitarian flotilla en route

¹² *The American Prospect* (2/15/2007)

¹³ *The Hill* – <http://thehill.com> (11/3/2009)

¹⁴ *Americans for Peace Now* – www.peacenow.org (7/30/2010)

¹⁵ *Ibid.* (7/16/2010)

¹⁶ *Congressional Scorecard – 111th Congress – The Arab American Institute*

¹⁷ *Americans for Peace Now* – www.peacenow.org (7/23/2010)

¹⁸ *Christian Science Monitor* (8/11/2010)

to Gaza.¹⁹ He cosponsored a letter implicitly criticizing the Obama administration's public handling of its disagreement with Israel over East Jerusalem settlements, arguing that Israel made strong efforts for peace and demanding that disagreements be handled "quietly, in trust and confidence."²⁰

Burton signed a resolution expressing support for Israel's right to use "military force," if necessary, to stop Iran's nuclear program.²¹

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

*As a lone state fighting for freedom and democracy in a region dominated by authoritarian and military regimes, Israel is the only country in the Middle East that the United States can fully count on to stand firm against the terrorists and oppressors.*²²

*"Israel has reached out to the Muslim world by giving Gaza back and they've even talked about a Palestinian state."*²³

JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

Current Chairman: Rep. John Conyers Jr. (D-MI)
Incoming Chairman: Rep. Lamar Smith (R-TX)

LAMAR SMITH

With Congressman Lamar Smith (R-TX) at the helm of the Judiciary Committee, it is likely that immigration enforcement and border security and enhancement will take precedence over civil liberties and immigration reform.

In the lead up to the midterms, Congressman Smith wrote an opinion piece reiterating the importance of national security in the upcoming election.²⁴ Smith focused on several attempted and completed incidents of terrorism, stressing the importance of treating such individuals, including Guantanamo Bay detainees, as enemy combatants, rather than affording them due process protections such as "the right to remain silent" and access to U.S. civilian courts. He hinted that providing these individuals with due process protections would be tantamount to treating them as U.S. citizens.

¹⁹ *Congressional Scorecard – 111th Congress – Arab American Institute*

²⁰ *AIPAC.org* (3/26/2010)

²¹ *Library of Congress* (7/22/2010)

²² *Congressman Dan Burton's Website* (1/9/2009)

²³ *Ibid.* (6/4/2010)

²⁴ *FoxNews.com* (10/28/2010)

Additionally, Smith stressed the importance of border enforcement, stating that the border “fence” must be completed and that Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers be given “all the necessary resources to keep our border safe.”²⁵

Tying undocumented immigration to security, Smith stated: “If you don’t know who’s coming into the country, like illegal immigrants, then you don’t know what’s coming into the county, like terrorist weapons.”²⁶

Smith also expressed his interest in repealing the 14th Amendment birthright citizenship provision, calling the granting of citizenship a “misinterpretation of the 14th Amendment.”²⁷ He sponsored HR 1384 which backed the “inherent authority” of state and local authorities to enforce immigration law, in what is seen by some as an attempt to undermine one of the challenges against the notorious Arizona immigration law which encourages racial profiling.²⁸

Finally, like Darrell Issa (R-CA), incoming Chair on the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, Congressman Smith made comments about President Obama which liberal bloggers took to be hinting at impeachment, particularly his description of the Obama administration as being “awfully close to a violation of their oath of office” for not doing enough to secure the border and enforce immigration law.²⁹

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

“The transfer or release of Gitmo detainees presents a clear and present danger to all Americans. As Members of Congress, it is our responsibility to act in the best interest of our constituents. If transferred to prisons in Texas, these alleged terrorists are likely to be given constitutional rights. That means they could petition friendly federal judges who may order their release into Texas communities.”³⁰

“Citizenship is the greatest honor our country can bestow and should not be given away lightly. Amnesty - through the DREAM Act or otherwise - is an affront to citizens and legal immigrants who have played by the rules. The DREAM Act is a nightmare for the American people.”³¹

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *National Review Online (4/30/2003)*

²⁷ *Politico (7/29/2010)*

²⁸ *American Immigration Lawyers Association – www.aila.org (11/3/2010)*

²⁹ *ThinkProgress.org (7/19/2010)*

³⁰ *Congressman Lamar Smith’s Website (2/11/2009)*

³¹ *The Hill (5/13/2010)*

SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION, CITIZENSHIP, REFUGEES, BORDER SECURITY, AND INTERNATIONAL LAW MEMBERSHIP

Current Chairwoman: Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)
Incoming Chairman: Rep. Steve King (R-IA)

STEVE KING

Congressman Steve King's approach to immigration will be a major change from how current leading democrats handled immigration. Like Congressman Smith, King has prioritized enforcement and border security, rather than reforming the legal immigration system.

King joined Smith in opposing the Justice Department's decision to sue the state of Arizona over SB 1070, and hinted at strengthening E-Verify and other cooperative measures with local law enforcement.³² Such measures often increase the chances of racial profiling (which King has explicitly defended) and can provide local law enforcement unfettered power to enforce federal immigration law. King also voted to extend the PATRIOT Act without the reforms needed to protect civil rights.³³

In 2008, King predicted that Al-Qaeda would celebrate the election of Barack Obama, and later lamented the President's decision to use his middle name during his inauguration.³⁴ He also refused to vote for a resolution recognizing Muslims on the occasion of the Ramadan holiday.³⁵

In the area of foreign policy, King has supported Israel's *Operation Cast Lead* in Gaza, called for the dismissal of the Goldstone Report, and defended Israel's deadly raid on the humanitarian flotilla en route to Gaza this summer.³⁶

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

*"First let me say, Mr. Speaker, that profiling has always been an important component of legitimate law enforcement. If you can't profile someone, you can't use those common sense indicators that are before your very eyes"*³⁷

Q: *"I keep reading that Obama keeps bringing small quantities of Muslims into this country. Why can't Congress stop that?"*

Steve King: *"You know, I don't know what the basis is of that. I wouldn't be surprised that that is the real factual basis. I know that the immigration that we have going on, there are [sic] a number of different ways that people come into the country. Family reunification is one of them. ... I appreciate you making the point. I will try to watch it."*³⁸

³² *WashingtonIndependent.com* (9/23/2010)

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Politico.com* (1/16/2009)

³⁵ *Fox News* (12/12/2007)

³⁶ *Congressional Scorecard – 111th Congress – The Arab American Institute*

³⁷ *PoliticalCorrection.com* (6/15/2010)

³⁸ *Colorado Independent* (6/23/2010)

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Current Chairman: Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-MS)
Incoming Chairman: Rep. Peter King (R-NY)

PETER KING

Over the past few years, Congressman King cosponsored legislation that supported Israel's *Operation Cast Lead* in Gaza, supported a resolution to dismiss the Goldstone Report, voted to support Israel's deadly raid on the flotilla, and voted to extend the PATRIOT Act without reforms.³⁹ King was among the members of Congress who took an anti-Arab position, in opposition to the Bush Administration, against allowing the Dubai Ports deal to go through.⁴⁰

With an almost singular focus on the threat of Islam, King asserted that extremists control 85% of mosques in the US,⁴¹ and was an outspoken critic of President Obama for not opposing the building of a Muslim community center in lower Manhattan. He further went on record suggesting that the government needed to investigate the source of funding for Park 51 *and* Imam Faisal Abdul Rauf himself, a private citizen.⁴²

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

*"There are too many mosques in this country."*⁴³

King's condition for supporting a path for legalization for undocumented immigrants:
*"Every time we give amnesty for an illegal alien, we deport a liberal."*⁴⁴

*"It's not just people who are involved with the terrorists and extremists, it is people who are in mainstream Islam, leaders of mosques, leaders of Muslim organizations who do not come forward and denounce, officially denounce, officially cooperate with the police against those extremists and terrorists. So, it goes beyond the terrorists and the extremists and also includes those in what others call mainstream Muslim leadership."*⁴⁵

On Democrats: *"I hope they put our relationship with Israel above their relationship with Obama"*⁴⁶

³⁹ Congressional Scorecard – 111th Congress – The Arab American Institute

⁴⁰ Time Magazine – time.com (2/20/2006)

⁴¹ Politico.com (9/19/2007)

⁴² Politico.com (7/19/2010)

⁴³ Politico.com (9/19/2007)

⁴⁴ The Iowa Independent – iowaindependent.com (10/26/2010)

⁴⁵ ThinkProgress.org (10/28/2010)

⁴⁶ New York Post (6/14/2010)

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

Current Chairman: Rep. David Obey (D-WI)
Incoming Chairman: Rep. Jerry Lewis (R-CA)

JERRY LEWIS

Unlike current Chairman David Obey, incoming House Appropriations Committee Chair Jerry Lewis cast a vote against the Goldstone Report documenting the atrocities committed in Gaza, and signed the letter in defense of Israel's attack on the humanitarian flotilla en route to Gaza.⁴⁷ He also strongly opposed the Obama Administration's decision to challenge Arizona's controversial immigration law (SB-1070).⁴⁸

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

*"There is no doubt that our immigration officials have not done what is necessary to stop the violence and lawlessness along our border, and that is what caused Arizona to enact this law. Republicans on the Appropriations Committee have a standing commitment to provide the resources necessary, but instead of a workable border plan, the administration wastes funds on challenging this state law."*⁴⁹

STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS AND RELATED PROGRAMS SUBCOMMITTEE

Current Chairman: Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY)
Incoming Chairwoman: Rep. Kay Granger (R-TX)

KAY GRANGER

During her time as the ranking member for this subcommittee in the 111th Congress, Congresswoman Granger voted to dismiss the Goldstone Report, and voted in defense of Israel's raid on the humanitarian flotilla en route to Gaza. She also voted to extend the PATRIOT Act without the reforms needed to protect our civil rights.⁵⁰ In a letter to her constituents, Granger expressed concern about illegal immigration from Arab countries. Her lack of support for international organizations garnered her an "F" rating from Citizens for Global Solutions.⁵¹

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

*"There are people crossing illegally from countries known to harbor terrorists such as Syria, Lebanon, Iran and Iraq."*⁵²

⁴⁷ Congressional Scorecard – 111th Congress – The Arab American Institute

⁴⁸ Jerry Lewis's website: jerrylewis.house.gov (7/28/2010)

⁴⁹ Ibid. (7/28/2010)

⁵⁰ Congressional Scorecard – 111th Congress – The Arab American Institute

⁵¹ ForeignPolicy.com (10/25/2010)

⁵² Kay Granger's website: kaygranger.house.gov (11/10/2005)

MORE ARAB AMERICANS JOIN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Two new Arab Americans will join the House in January, nearly doubling our numbers in Congress and bringing the size of the Arab American caucus to its highest level in 8 years. Joining Representatives Nick Rahall (D-WV), Darrell Issa (R-CA), and Charles Boustany (R-LA) are two new faces: State Representative Justin Amash (R-MI) and Richard Hanna (R-NY).

Justin Amash has been a State Representative for Michigan's 72nd District since 2008, and was recently named one of TIME Magazine's "40 under 40 - Rising Stars of U.S. Politics." He is also only the second Palestinian-American to serve in Congress – former Senator John E. Sununu being the first.

Richard Hanna, who was born in Utica and is of Arab descent, won a solid victory against Congressman Michael Arcuri to become the next Representative of New York's 24th district after losing his bid for the seat in 2008 by just 2 percentage points. Earlier this year, Hanna was named as one of TIME Magazine's top GOP candidates to watch in 2010.

Faced by a well-funded Republican challenger, the dean of the Arab American caucus, Congressman **Nick Rahall** successfully defended his seat in West Virginia. Despite his opponent's attempt to play the "Arab card" to tarnish his image,⁵³ Rahall won by a comfortable margin (56%-44%).

ISLAMOPHOBIA COMES TO CAPITOL HILL

Some Tea Party candidates who have employed anti-Muslim rhetoric as part of their campaign have prevailed in their bid to join Congress.

In Florida, **Allen West** defeated Congressman Ron Klein. During the campaign, West said "Islam is a totalitarian, theocratic, political ideology. It is not a religion."⁵⁴ He opposes the two-state solution and says Israel's borders should be dictated by the Bible.⁵⁵

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

"Mahmoud Abbas isn't the leader of anything else than a gang."⁵⁶

"You need to get into the Quran, you need to understand their precepts, you need to read the Sura, you need to read the Hadiths and then you can really understand this is not a perversion. They are doing exactly what this book says...until we get principled

⁵³ *Huffington Post (10/21/2010)*

⁵⁴ *Miami Herald (10/13/2010)*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

leadership in the United States that is willing to say that, we will continue to chase our tail because we will never clearly define who this enemy is”⁵⁷

In North Carolina, **Renee Ellmers** succeeded in defeating Congressman Bob Etheridge. She gained national notoriety when she ran campaign ads conflating “Muslim” with “terrorist” in opposition to the Muslim community center in New York.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

“The terrorists haven’t won, and we should tell them in plain English: NO! There will never be a mosque at Ground Zero.”⁵⁸

“I am running for the people of District 2 NC, who are good, hardworking Christian people.”⁵⁹

Right now, our issues figure prominently in domestic and international policy debates. From immigration reform to Park 51, from racial profiling to the peace negotiations, America’s greatest concerns are *our* greatest concerns. This next session of Congress will provide the greatest opportunity to act on these concerns, to effect change, to educate our policymakers and our pundits, our newscasters and our neighbors.

We hope that this report, coming at the end of 2010, will mark the beginning of a fruitful dialog with the leadership of the 112th Congress.

⁵⁷ Hudson Institute’s Youtube Channel: *The First Annual Reclaim American Liberty Conference (1/13/2010)*

⁵⁸ CBS News (9/22/2010)

⁵⁹ CNN.com (9/25/2010)