

President Barack Obama's
Letter to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

Dear Prime Minister Netanyahu:

Thank you very much for your thoughtful letter. I understand and appreciate your *cri de coeur*.

Please allow me to explain my point of view. Not too long ago, I was speaking with an Israeli friend who observed with great interest the recent mid-term American elections. I was shocked when he asked me whether I was going to resign. He explained that, in a parliamentary system, when the prime minister loses the confidence of the people and opposition parties win the election, the prime minister must resign. The person at the head of the ticket in a parliamentary system becomes the prime minister, and if that party no longer retains power, the person who leads the ticket is no longer able to serve in the prime minister position. My friend seemed surprised and nonplussed. Some scholars claim that our constitutional system of checks and balances is antique and ought to be replaced with a parliamentary system.

We have three co-equal branches of government. The exception to that general proposition sometimes swallows up the rule. Our United States Supreme Court, in *Marbury v. Madison*, said that the Court could nullify an act of Congress or the President. The President can do many things that are in essence "nullification." The President can issue executive orders and take other actions, undermining legislation that Congress may pass or decisions of the Supreme Court. Likewise, Congress is in a position to take actions which the President may not agree with. For example, all revenue bills, according to our Constitution, find their genesis; you should pardon the expression, in the House of Representatives.

What is unique about America is that these co-equal branches of government can truck along, doing their jobs and run the country without any particular cooperation from the other branches of government. Our Supreme Court regularly issues decisions finding acts of Congress or the President unconstitutional, without any particular notoriety. Congress can overrule a President's veto. The President, although a lame duck, has considerable power. All of this seems very dysfunctional to those who come from a parliamentary system which is a kind of pyramid whereby the prime minister cannot function if the electorate has disapproved of his party's policies. Nevertheless, it is both the beauty and the beast of the American system. We seem to go along, sometimes lurching from left to right without any particular rationale, just because we can.

It is in this spirit of the great American gunslinger at the O.K. Corral that the Majority Leader of the United States Senate, John Boehner, invited you to speak to Congress and, most recently, has invited the new Pope. I am a fan of both of you. I love Muslims, Catholics and Jews. In fact, I love everyone. Sometimes the press criticizes me for my desire to be a lover rather than a fighter, but that is who I am.

Let us come to basic terms with Senator Boehner's invitation to have you speak at Congress. As you know from deliberate press releases, I have been terribly annoyed about this. I have said nasty things about you. I have made sure that my administration officials refer to you as "chicken _____," and I have done other things that in most ordinary and civil discourse would be inappropriate. That is okay. You and other foreign leaders have done the same to me. In fact, my own countrymen have called me a Muslim, a Nigerian, a foreigner, and the Manchurian candidate. I have been called a lot of nasty things.

The real question is whether it is *menschlichkeit* for the majority leader, flexing his newfound muscles, to invite a foreigner to speak to Congress and not check with me. Legally, of course, he has the right to do it. He can invite the leader of North Korea or the head of ISIS or anybody else he likes to speak to Congress. Under our system, he can do it and all I can do is whine, scream and complain. By the same token, I can invite to the White House to give speeches anybody I want. I could invite the head of Saudi Arabia, even though they have funded schools and operations that teach hatred of Americans, Christians, Jews, and everyone else. I can invite to the White House Muslim radicals. I can pretty much invite anybody I want. After all, it was Bill Clinton who raised money for his various elections by having rich, corrupt people sleep in certain bedrooms in the White House. *C'est la vie*.

The issue is whether it is smart and prudent for you to come and speak to Congress when the Republican majority of the Senate attempts a *frassk* in *pisk*. Do you want to risk irritating me when I still have a fair amount of power not only among members of the press, the electorate and a minority of Congress, but even some world leaders. After all, I am still the President of the greatest power the world has ever known. Really, should you come here and speak to the Congress without kissing my *tuchas*?

Now this may seem like an odd or even inappropriate question, but it is *realpolitik*. It is a practical question and not really a political one.

I understand from your letter that the survival of your country and the Jewish people, who have been beaten up and slaughtered for centuries, is very important to you. It is important to me, but in a more, shall we say, esoteric way. I do not want to see any people slaughtered or decimated, but after all, the Jewish people have been used to it. "Some of my best friends are Jewish."

It probably makes good common sense for you not to make me mad and not to appear overtly political to your own people. Common sense would dictate that you find some reason not to come here. However, as between the two of us, it is probably me who should withdraw from this unnecessary battle. After all, I am still the greatest. I won two elections overwhelmingly, and I am head, as I said earlier, of the greatest power that the world has ever known. It is easier for me to step back and let you have your moment in the sun than to force you to step down, thus degrading you before your people and many Americans who really like you a lot and think that you are the kind of Jew they would be willing to support.

It is therefore my concerted decision that you should come and speak to Congress, and in fact I will even meet with you. We will shake hands and look happy before the cameras. We can

continue to hate each other, but we have something in common. We want to protect both of our people and, in fact, the whole civilized world against destruction. We both realize that, for radical Arabs to have “the bomb” will mean the end of civilization as we know it. We both understand that cannot happen. Perhaps I have been a bit rash in my anger at you because we have been involved in an ego struggle. It is time, I think, to put those differences aside for the good of our nations and the future of the world.

I will make a public statement welcoming you and the Pope. I will tell John Boehner that we want to be partners for the advancement of peaceful solutions to the world’s problems. I will be the big guy because, in fact, I am the big guy, and I will be the big guy until the last day that I serve as President of the United States. Only the President of the United States can step aside, withdraw from an unnecessary dispute, and show the world how people can get along even when they have substantial personality differences.

So, Mr. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, come to the United States in health, safety and peace. Speak to our Congress. Tell our people and our Congress why Iran’s nuclear ambitions must be stopped in their tracks. I will shake your hand, I will kiss you on both cheeks, and I will work with you to forge an honest coalition to defeat radical Islam (a term I try not to use in public).

Baruch Hashem, and Shalom Aleichem
President Barack Obama, The Most
Powerful Man in the World

*Clifford A. Rieders, Esquire
Rieders, Travis, Humphrey,
Waters & Dohrmann
161 West Third Street
Williamsport, PA 17701
(570) 323-8711 (telephone)
(570) 323-4192 (facsimile)*

Cliff Rieders, who practices law in Williamsport, is Past President of the Pennsylvania Trial Lawyers Association and a member of the Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority. None of the opinions expressed necessarily represent the views of these organizations.