

“MORE RESPECTED AROUND THE WORLD”? REALLY?

[youtube]<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nwPEHeRa39k>[/youtube]

Political speeches, by nature, push the limits of truth. Because of that, the process of sorting out truths from lies in political speeches has become something of a cottage industry. The bald-faced lie that Obama told in only his third sentence of last night's State of the Union speech, however, doesn't need a dedicated fact-checking organization to see the dishonesty. As Marcy has already pointed out, Obama framed his speech entirely around chest-thumping over the killing of Osama bin Laden. But let's look only at that third sentence:

We gather tonight knowing that this generation of heroes has made the United States safer and more respected around the world.

I won't even go into the issue of whether the US is now safer due to the military misadventures started by the Bush-Cheney administration and continued enthusiastically by Obama. But the claim that the US is more respected around the world because of "this generation of heroes" displays the very militaristic arrogance that is the chief reason Americans are attacked. Because the bulk of these military activities take place in the Arab world, that seems the most appropriate place to look for evidence of Obama's claimed "respect". On July 13, 2011, the Arab American Institute Foundation released the results of a Zogby poll (pdf) conducted on their behalf. From the executive summary:

With the 2008 election of Barack Obama, favorable attitudes toward the U.S. more than doubled in many Arab countries. But in the two years since his famous "Cairo

speech,” ratings for both the U.S. and the President have spiraled downwards. The President is seen overwhelmingly as failing to meet the expectations set during his speech, and the vast majority of those surveyed disagree with U.S policies.

In five out of the six countries surveyed, the U.S. was viewed less favorably than Turkey, China, France—or Iran. Far from seeing the U.S. as a leader in the post-Arab Spring environment, the countries surveyed viewed “U.S. interference in the Arab world” as the greatest obstacle to peace and stability in the Middle East, second only to the continued Palestinian occupation.

But Obama’s tone deafness in using the bin Laden killing as evidence for US respect is especially galling, since we have this:

The killing of bin Laden only worsened attitudes toward the U.S.

In touting how the US is “more respected”, Obama is relying on the most prominent recent event that has caused a worsening of opinion of the US in the Arab world. It is behavior like this that has put the US now at an approval level in the Arab world that is “lower than at the end of the Bush Administration, and lower than Iran’s favorable ratings (except in Saudi Arabia)”.

Of course it’s not just the killing of bin Laden or Obama’s chest-thumping that have angered the Arab world. Just in the last few days, there are numerous examples of US behavior that can only result in resentment in the Arab world.

On Monday, we heard from the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights:

United Nations human rights chief Navi Pillay is voicing “deep disappointment”

that the U.S. government has failed to close its detention facility at Guantanamo Bay (Cuba), as President Barack Obama pledged on taking office three years ago.

Pillay, in a statement Monday, noted the 10th anniversary of the prison opening and the third anniversary of Obama's inauguration promise to close the facility within 12 months. She also said that prisoners remain "arbitrarily detained indefinitely," and called the detentions "a clear breach of international law."

The US fails miserably at policing its wrongs, as well:

The lone Marine convicted in his squad's killing of two dozen unarmed civilians in one of the Iraq War's defining moments escaped jail time Tuesday after defending his order to raid homes in Haditha as a necessary act "to keep the rest of my Marines alive."

The sentencing of Staff Sgt. Frank Wuterich ends a six-year prosecution for the 2005 attack that failed to win any manslaughter convictions. Eight Marines were initially charged. One was acquitted, and six others had their cases dropped.

Wuterich admitted he ordered his squad to "shoot first, ask questions later" after a roadside bomb killed a fellow Marine as part of a deal that ended his manslaughter trial with a guilty plea Monday to a single count of negligent dereliction of duty.

That's going to generate lots of respect, isn't it?

And Pakistan also rejects our efforts at self-

investigation when things go wrong:

Pakistan's military on Monday rejected U.S. findings on a November 26 NATO cross-border air attack that killed 24 Pakistani soldiers, reducing the chances of a resolution of the dispute and an improvement in ties which are at their lowest in years.

"Pakistan does not agree with several portions and findings of the investigation report, as these are factually not correct," the military said in a statement after a detailed review of the U.S. investigation.

The U.S. report released on December 22 found both American and Pakistani forces were to blame for the incident near the Afghan border, inflaming already strained ties.

In part because of this report, members of Pakistan's parliament have renewed their calls for Pakistan to shoot down drones entering their airspace.

Finally, we have the renewed discussion on the issue of Afghan troops deciding to kill NATO troops despite being trained by them. By trying to retroactively classify a detailed report into the attitudes that fuel such rage, the US merely looks like it is trying to hide embarrassing information.

And now, amid all this "respect" that the US has generated in the Arab world, we are rattling our sabres toward the Persians. Yeah, that's going to help.