

Muslims wait for signs of change from Obama

by [Omar Sacirbey](#) in the [June 14, 2011](#) issue

Officially, President Obama was talking to the Muslim world in his State Department speech in May, but U.S. Muslims were equally interested in how their faith will be treated in a post-Osama bin Laden era.

U.S.

Muslims tuned in hoping for clear direction from Obama on America's plans for the unrest in the Middle East and the strained relations with Pakistan, a critical but wobbly ally in the fight against terrorism.

Adil

Najam, who teaches international relations at Boston University, said Muslims—weary of being depicted as fundamentalists and terrorists—want to be taken seriously as partners in democracy who have risked their lives to overthrow Arab dictatorships.

That change in image, he said, could improve the image that Americans have of their Muslims neighbors. "American Muslims are asking, 'What does it mean to be Muslim in America? What will this mean for my children in school tomorrow?'" Najam said. "To be not talked about as the 'other' or as the enemy is a very big thing."

Ibrahim Ramey of the Washington-based Muslim American Society welcomed Obama's May 19 speech for acknowledging the generally nonviolent Arab Spring of 2011, but wished Obama could say the same about the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Ramey

also criticized Obama's position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which he said didn't take sufficient account of Palestinian aspirations

for an independent state.

"Many Muslims in the U.S. would be hesitant to say that peace can be achieved without America reevaluating its position on Palestine and Israel," Ramey said, adding that most U.S. Muslims "recognize the legitimate right of the Jewish people" to a peaceful and secure Israel. —RNS