




AntiWar.com's Garris: More War Under Obama

The New American: What's your initial impression of the Obama presidency? 

Eric Garris: Obama's slogan "Yes, we can" is kind of a scary one. Because from a foreign policy perspective, it's saying we can do anything anywhere. And that's a very, very ominous thing for anyone in charge of the government to say.

TNA: *Obama ran on the campaign that he would remove the United States from Iraq, but during the campaign he began to back off and said 16 months. And most recently he said 19 months, but then even after 19 months they wouldn't all come home. Where does he stand with his pledge?*

Garris: About where Richard Nixon stood with his pledge to get us out of Vietnam. In terms of the same percentages, he reminds me very much of what Richard Nixon said he was doing in Vietnam. He wanted to end the war by winning it. And although Obama is not talking about winning the war anymore, he's talking about an indefinite continuation of it. If he goes through with his plan, we're still talking about leaving 50,000 troops and between 100,000 and 200,000 contractors in Iraq who are going to be there providing security assistance for the Iraqis. In other words, they're going to be in combat. And if something happens, there's going to be an escalation there. So Obama is continuing the trap that George Bush set. With Obama's plan, there's no way we're going to be getting out of Iraq any time in the next 10 to 20 years.

TNA: *Barack Obama just released his first budget and part of that budget was obviously defense spending. He took President Bush's surge-level military budget and increased it by four percent. If he's going to decrease our involvement in Iraq and elsewhere, where's the peace dividend?*

Garris: You read the analysts and they claim that there's not really any savings in bringing the troops home, because it costs more to bring them home than to keep them where they are. Government sets up Catch-22s for itself everywhere, not just in defense. And once they start something in motion it can never be stopped.

TNA: *Wait a minute. It cost more to bring them home than it does to send them there?*

Garris: In some cases, yes. The transporting of all the equipment has to take place with the troops and that's very, very expensive. It's essentially the same kind of costs that were involved with bringing them there to begin with. Just leaving them there, that's actually a lower cost than bringing them home. So that's one of the arguments against doing this too quickly: that it's too costly.

TNA: *Maybe we should ship that equipment home "parcel post" rather than "first class"?*

Garris: Exactly, or just destroy some of that stuff. It would be cheaper rather than bringing it home.

TNA: *Let's talk about the anti-war left. To a certain extent, they were interesting but politically powerless during the Bush administration, just as people like myself who are on the anti-war right are now interesting but politically powerless in Washington under Obama. What role do you think the anti-war left will have in the fight against empire with a Democratic majority in Congress and a Democrat in the White House?*

Garris: Unfortunately, we see a lot of the progressive left — I hate that term, but they apparently like it — they don't want to challenge Obama on anything.



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TNA: *Why not?*

Garris: Because they think he is supporting enough of what they want that they don't want to interfere in any way. And you've seen a lot of the left essentially roll over, on the issues of war and on the issues of civil liberties, and are either defending him or are just silent. And that's unfortunate, but predictable. A lot of people are more interested in partisan politics or in other issues where they were only using the war as an excuse [for their opposition to a candidate or party]. Al Franken comes to mind. He is an extreme hawk when it comes to Afghanistan, yet he has been portrayed as an anti-war candidate. And I think that's false. He has merely used the Iraq War as a political lever against the Republicans. Within the left it's truth time. And you'll see who really is truly against American empire and who isn't by how they line up against the Obama administration.

I've seen this before. This happened during the early years of AntiWar.com, for example, during the Kosovo war, when you saw a split in the left over whether they supported the U.S. intervention in Kosovo. You saw this during the Vietnam War in how slowly the so-called dove liberals came to oppose Lyndon Johnson.

TNA: *And you could argue from the right's perspective, the Republican side of the spectrum, a lot of the "Hannitized" people on the right during the Bush administration supported the Iraq war or were silent.*

Garris: Exactly.

TNA: *The Bush administration claimed that there had been no terror attacks on American soil since September 11. Don't you find it interesting that whenever they say that, it's like they're saying that there haven't been any attacks on Americans that count? Yet all you have to do is go to AntiWar.com on any particular day and see that there have been attacks on Americans, and they've died, but that they are U.S. soldiers. And those who tout the "no terror attack" line are the same people who say most proudly and loudly that they "support the troops."*

Garris: Yes, and they also say that we have to fight them over there so that they won't come over here, which means we are sending our troops into a meat grinder. Other than lip service, the pro-war crowd doesn't care for the troops as individuals or as people that need to live.

TNA: *What's unique about AntiWar.com?*

Garris: I've been involved in politics for 40 years, and I've never been involved in anything that has been as cost-efficient or energy-efficient as AntiWar.com. And I think that the readers see that, and they support us in a way that is unprecedented. We have a budget that is over \$400,000 a year, 90 percent of which is paid for by readers with averaged \$50 contributions when we have our quarterly pledge drive.

TNA: *With a staff of 10 and a budget of just a little over \$400,000, it's pretty clear you guys aren't in it for the money.*

Garris: That's true. And it's not all salaries, either. We have a lot of other expenses. We've got lawyers to pay, and that sort of thing. Did you see my [blog entry](#) about the *Baghdad Mosquito*?

TNA: *I missed it.*

Garris: That's one where we have to contact our lawyer about this, so that's going to cost us a little money. The *Baghdad Mosquito* is a publication of the multinational force in Iraq, and it's distributed to high level officers and intelligence officials. So it's not available to the public.



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TNA: *Except you made it available to the public?*

Garris: Yes. What happened was that an Iraqi newspaper translated one of [AntiWar.com writer] Scott Horton's articles and ran it, and the *Baghdad Mosquito* also ran the article with the commentary saying that this is amazing because this publication is usually very unbiased and they are not known for running something so left-wing.

TNA: *Referring to AntiWar.com?*

Garris: Right, referring to Scott's article.

TNA: *Apparently, they don't know Scott very well.*

Garris: I did a blog entry about it and the staff of the *Mosquito* [contacted me and said](#) that the *Mosquito* is a publication "for official use only. Please delete all copies and quit dissemination."

TNA: *How did you get it in the first place?*

Garris: Somebody sent it to us. I don't know. Somebody e-mailed it and said, look, you're in the *Baghdad Mosquito*.

TNA: *It's good to know that you are attracting official notice.*

Garris: On the average a half of a percent of our visitors are from .mil sites.

TNA: I assume that the military readers are a mix of people — those in the military and agree with you and those on the other side who are watching you?

Garris: I would say it's a third, a third, and the other third are those people that don't agree with us but find us an excellent source of international news. Because we do find people writing us saying: "I don't agree with you, but you're the best news source of international news. I go to you every day and here's \$50."

TNA: *That's unusual. Or is it?*

Garris: It isn't unusual for us, and that's what's amazing. I think that represents a significant portion of our viewers.

TNA: *So you are not just preaching to the choir. You are talking to people who are potentially impressionable.*

Garris: Exactly. I also think that the quality of the people who read AntiWar.com is higher than average. It's not just a matter of numbers. We have a lot of very influential people who read AntiWar.com, opinion makers and a lot of smarter people. I don't want to sound too elitist, but we did a reader survey recently and got a pretty good response. And it showed that 45 percent of our readers have post-graduate degrees and 35 percent have four year degrees.

TNA: *Now I find myself privileged to be among the elite.*

Garris: And we have consistently ranked among the top 20 political websites on the Web according to Hitwise, which is the most prominent of the ratings systems.

TNA: *So anyone from The New American who is not familiar with [AntiWar.com](#) should definitely check you out.*

Garris: Absolutely. And we link to a lot of articles from *The New American*. I would say, at least two or three a week, either news or viewpoints.



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on March 19, 2009

For another segment of this interview, see "[AntiWar.com's Garris: The Burden of Empire.](#)"



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