

Barack Hussein Obama: US "one of the largest Muslim countries in the world"

By [Toby Harnden World](#) Last updated: June 3rd, 2009

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It is important to note that “if you actually took the number of Muslim Americans, we’d be one of the largest Muslim countries in the world”.

So says President Barack Obama. Or I should say: Barack Hussein Obama.

That’s right: Barack Hussein Obama. Say it proud. Say it out loud. The middle moniker that dared not speak its name during the election campaign is now front and centre of the US president’s attempt to woo the Muslim world, the theme of his visits to Riyadh on Wednesday and Cairo on Thursday.

Petrified of the potential political fallout of being branded a Muslim, Candidate Obama - a [practicing Christian](#) - never used the name “Hussein” and its use was frowned upon as a forbidden code for the nutty accusation that he was some kind of Islamic Manchurian candidate.

No more. To say Barack Hussein Obama - BHO for short - now appears to be the height of political correctness.

As I argue in [this analysis](#) for the Telegraph dead tree edition, Obama is seeking to return to a Middle East policy based on realism - buttressed by the bona fides of his own multi-cultural (including Muslim) background.

In [Strasbourg two months ago](#), the president tried out his full name. Days later [in Ankara](#), he was introduced to the Turkish parliament by his full name.

As ABC’s Jake Tapper and Sunlen Miller [astutely outline here](#), the Obama administration is embracing the new president’s inner Muslim, as it were. Deputy national security adviser stated that Obama had “experienced Islam on three continents...growing up in Indonesia, having a Muslim father — obviously Muslim Americans [are] a key part of Illinois and Chicago”.

So that’s [once, twice, three times](#) a Muslim?

Just in case the Arab world hasn’t yet got this message of inbuilt tolerance, Mr Obama himself has gone a step further. In an [interview with France’s Canal Plus](#) released on Tuesday evening, he suggested that the United States might be a Muslim country.

Obama said he wanted to “create a better dialogue so that the Muslim world understands more effectively how the United States but also how the West thinks about many of these difficult issues like terrorism, like democracy, to discuss the framework for what’s happened in Iraq and Afghanistan and our outreach to Iran, and also how we view the prospects for peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians”.

So far, so blah - President George W. Bush often expressed much the same sentiments.

But then, as is his habit, Obama turned the concept around. “Now, the flip side is I think that the United States and the West generally, we have to educate ourselves more effectively on Islam.

“And one of the points I want to make is, is that if you actually took the number of Muslim Americans, we’d be one of the largest Muslim countries in the world. And so there’s got to be a better dialogue and a better understanding between the two peoples.”

Obama [said in Turkey](#) that Americans “do not consider ourselves a Christian nation or a Jewish nation or a Muslim nation”. John McCain was [criticised in 2007](#) for saying the US was “a Christian nation”, later [amending this](#) to “a Judeo-Christian valued nation”.

Of course, the concept of separation of church and state, which derived from the First Amendment to the Constitution, means that the US is not officially a Christian nation or a nation of any other particular religion. Which means, I suppose, that the US is as much a Muslim nation as a Christian one.

It's a bold - some might say audacious - turnaround by the president.

It's also a classically Obamaesque move.

During the 2008 campaign, he skillfully made himself, through his life story, the personification of change.

Now, implicitly contrasting himself with the born-again, evangelical Bush who pursued a post-9/11 “[crusade](#)” against terrorism, Obama is presenting himself to the Islamic world as the personification of a new, tolerant - and, yes, partly Muslim - America.

UPDATE: The excellent Don Surber [crunches the numbers](#) and points out that Obama's claim is highly dubious. According to Surber, the US has an estimated three to eight million Muslims, less than one per cent of the world's total and less than at least 23 other countries.

The average claim for the US Muslim population is about six million. The precise figure is difficult to get because it's not included in US census data and many put the figure at [much, much less](#).

But even if we assume there are six million Muslims in the US, that makes it only the [34th biggest Muslim country](#) in the world - behind Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Turkey, Egypt, Iran, Nigeria, China, Ethiopia, Algeria, Morocco, Afghanistan, Sudan, Iraq, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, Yemen, Tanzania, Syria, Malaysia, Niger, Senegal, Ghana, Tunisia, Somalia, Guinea, Kenya, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Burkina Faso and Tajikistan.

UPDATE 2: [Debbie Schlüssel cites](#) a reputable survey by Pew that puts the number of Muslims in the US at 1.8 million. This would make it the 48th biggest Muslim country, after the above list plus France, Libya, Jordan, Israel, Turkmenistan, Uganda, Kyrgyzstan, Mauritania, Germany, Kuwait, Oman, Eritrea, Lebanon and Serbia and Montenegro - and just above Britain, which would be the 50th.

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