

[Progressive Defense of Weiner Overlooks His Right-Wing Foreign Policy](#)

A surprising number of progressives have been expressing regret at the resignation of Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-New York) over the “sexting” scandal, correctly noting how the grossly inflated media coverage has distracted from far more pressing issues, as well as the far worse sins (mostly not involving sex) committed by Republican lawmakers. What is disturbing, however, is the way Weiner is being treated as if he was a leading progressive voice on Capitol Hill despite his decidedly right-wing political agenda, particularly on foreign policy.

For example, [blogger Katie Halper](#) argued that lying about sending explicit pictures to young women via text message isn't nearly as bad as lying about weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) that led to a tragic, illegal and unnecessary war.

Unfortunately, Weiner was one those who did lie about Iraqi WMDs. Despite strong antiwar sentiment in his liberal district, he was among the right-wing minority of Democrats on Capitol Hill who unconstitutionally provided George W. Bush the unprecedented power to invade a country on the far side of the world that was no threat to us, at the time and circumstances of his own choosing. And, to this day, Weiner supports unconditional funding for the ongoing Iraq occupation. Weiner's war vote revealed contempt for the most basic principles of international law, including the United Nations (UN) Charter, which prohibits such aggressive war. He demonstrated a willingness to sacrifice over 4,500 American lives and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi lives, help create a whole new generation of Islamist extremists radicalized by the invasion of the Arab heartland by a Western power, and sacrifice over one trillion dollars – which could have been used here at home for health care, education, the environment, public transportation, housing and other human needs – for oil and empire.

Weiner is also one of the most right-wing members of Congress when it comes to backing the right-wing government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

While President Obama's refusal to pressure Israel to end its colonization of the occupied Palestinian West Bank has brought him criticism from supporters of international law, Weiner has joined Republicans in attacking Obama's Middle East policy from the right. For example, when Obama raised concerns about Israel's expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank (in violation of the road map and other US-led peace initiatives, a landmark World Court ruling, the Fourth Geneva Convention and a series of UN Security Council resolutions), [Weiner announced](#), “There's a line between articulating US policy and seeming to be pressuring a democracy on what are their domestic policies, and the president is tiptoeing right up to that line.” Labeling the illegal colonization of someone else's country as “a domestic policy” is nothing short of endorsement of the right of conquest. Virtually the entire international community recognizes the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as being under belligerent occupation and distinguishes that region from the 78 percent of historic Palestine controlled by Israel prior to June 1967, which is recognized as within the purview of the Israel's domestic jurisdiction. [According to Weiner](#), however, “There are people who believe that there is settlement activity in the Palestinian territory. I don't believe that,” adding, “The settlement that is going on is in Israel.” Rejecting a two-state solution, he insists that Israel's western border is “the Jordan River.”

Despite the deaths of at least 900 civilians, including 400 children, from Israeli attacks, [Weiner called Israel's 2008-2009 war on Gaza](#) a “humane” war. Contradicting findings by [Amnesty International](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), the United Nations, the [Israeli human rights group B'Tselem](#) and other investigations – which found overwhelming evidence of widespread indiscriminate attacks on civilian population centers – [Weiner insisted](#) that Israel used restraint in its attacks on the heavily populated enclave “as surgical a job as possible.” [He also](#)

[defended](#) Israel's 2006 war on Lebanon, which killed at least 700 civilians, defending Israel's use of cluster bombs and claiming the war was a “defensive action,” and that, “This is a time of need for our ally.”

Weiner was a leading defender of last year's Israeli attack on a humanitarian aid flotilla in the high seas, during which Israeli commandoes killed nine people, including a 19-year-old US citizen, who was initially shot while filming the attack, then fatally shot, execution-style, [in the back of the head](#) while lying on the ship's deck. [In Weiner's view](#), murdering humanitarian aid workers in international waters is legitimate “self-defense” which he “strongly support(s).” Though this international effort was initiated by a broad coalition of human rights groups in several different countries, including the United States, [Weiner said](#), “We know this tragedy was instigated by Turkey.” And, though Turkey remains in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Wiener went as far as referring to Turkey as “our former ally.”

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Weiner's Intolerance for Dissent

Weiner has long been a fierce opponent of academic freedom, spearheading a campaign to press Columbia University to [fire political science professor Joseph Massad](#) for his criticisms of the right-wing Israeli government. Fortunately, despite Weiner's efforts to relaunch a McCarthyistic purge of professors who challenge the policies of the United States and its allies, Columbia held firm to its commitment to academic freedom. Ironically, [Massad has also been critical](#) of anti-Semites and others who have exaggerated the power of the “Jewish lobby” as the primary force behind US Middle East policy, recognizing more salient factors, including perceived US strategic interests and the use of Israel to advance US hegemony in the region. What apparently offends Weiner about scholars such as Massad, then, is not prejudice against Jews or a bias against Israel, but their audacity to challenge the essentially imperialistic view of the Bush administration and supporters of Bush's neoconservative agenda like himself.

Another target of Weiner's has been the [United States Institute of Peace \(USIP\)](#), a Congressionally funded foundation based in Washington that has engaged in research and education in conflict resolution and sends staff to various conflict regions for work in mediation and other efforts to prevent bloodshed. Though the organization is ideologically diverse in orientation and sometimes criticized from the left for its rather centrist orientation, Weiner apparently considers its “peace” orientation a threat to the American and Israeli wars he has so eagerly supported. While voting for hundreds of billions of dollars for the Iraq War and various other Pentagon boondoggles, [he has referred](#) to the USIP as a, “case study in how government waste thrives,” and calls the modest \$54 million in public funding proposed this year a “misuse of taxpayer money.” He has teamed up with right-wing Utah Republican Rep. Jason Chaffetz in co-sponsoring legislation to defund the USIP and has [cowritten articles in The Wall Street Journal](#) and elsewhere trashing the institute.

Weiner's intolerance for those who disagree with him extends even to international organizations. Despite treaty obligations that require the United States to allow recognized delegations access to the UN headquarters in New York, [Weiner introduced legislation](#) to bar the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) – recognized since 1974 as the Palestinians' sole legitimate representatives – from the UN. [Weiner called on](#) PLO representative Dr. Riyad Mansour, a distinguished US-educated academic, and his colleagues at the UN mission to pack their “little Palestinian terrorist bags.”

In Weiner's worldview, if you disagree with his right-wing predilections, such as his defense of the rightist government in Israel, you are attacked as ideologically biased: [If Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch \(HRW\)](#) documents Israeli violations of international humanitarian law, even if they simultaneously cite

violations by Arab parties, it means that Amnesty and HRW are “biased against Israel.” If mainstreams media outlets, [including the strongly pro-Israel New York Times](#), dare to report Israeli transgressions of international legal norms, he labels them as “biased against Israel” as well. He [has attacked](#) the International Court of Justice in the Hague for being biased against Israel for its near-unanimous 2004 advisory opinion (with only the US judge dissenting) noting that Israel – no more or less than any other country – is obliged to uphold international humanitarian law and that the separation barrier being built by that country's rightist government could not be built beyond the country's internationally recognized border. When the United Nations reported violations of international humanitarian law by both Hezbollah and Israel during their 2006 war, [Weiner claimed](#) that the UN, “seems to be siding with the terrorists.”

In order to advance his right-wing foreign policy agenda, Weiner has also been known to simply make things up. In addition to his false claims about Iraq still having weapons of mass destruction, he has claimed repeatedly that the high civilian casualty rates in the Israeli wars on Lebanon in 2006 and on the Gaza Strip in 2009 were due to Hezbollah's and Hamas' use of human shields, [despite exhaustive investigations by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch](#) and various UN agencies that did not find a single such incident. Weiner has claimed that the Israeli armed forces [do not occupy the West Bank](#), and even insists there isn't any Israeli military presence in the territory. He [claimed that Israel's blockade](#) of civilian goods to the Gaza Strip was “internationally recognized,” despite the widespread consensus to the contrary among international legal scholars, the [International Committee of the Red Cross](#) and reputable human rights groups. He [claimed](#) that the PLO is recognized by the US government as a “terrorist organization,” even though that designation was dropped over 20 years ago. He [even denied](#) that the moderate Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas is also head of the PLO, which Abbas has been since Yasir Arafat's death in 2004.

Why Do “Progressives” Defend Weiner?

Despite Weiner's right-wing proclivities and his intolerance of progressives, liberals, and even centrists who disagree with him, the hawkish New York Congressman still found himself on the receiving end of unqualified praise from prominent liberal organizations. The liberal group [Democracy for America](#) named him as a top hero in the House of Representatives, citing him as the third-most-influential “progressive” in that body. MoveOn and other progressive groups have routinely endorsed his re-election and heaped praise on his supposedly “progressive” agenda.

Many point to his relatively liberal positions on some economic issues, abortion, gay rights and other domestic concerns. However, a liberal record on domestic issues did not save hawkish Democrats like the late senators Hubert Humphrey and Henry Jackson from criticism for their support of the Vietnam War, nor did it curb criticism of Democrats who supported US intervention in Central America in the 1980's. Why has Weiner largely escaped critical scrutiny for his support for US and Israeli militarism, his disdain for international law and human rights, his quickness to attack human rights organizations and advocates, and his willingness to lie to advance his right-wing agenda?

There may be some underlying racism at work, in that his supporters may see Weiner's progressive positions on certain domestic issues that benefit (primarily white) Americans as somehow of more importance than policies which negatively impact Arabs and other people of color.

Has the bar become so low that politicians like Weiner are now considered progressive? Back in the 1980's, we referred to politicians who defended war crimes in Central America as “death squad Democrats.” Today, like-minded politicians who defend war crimes in the Middle East are labeled “progressive heroes.” Self-described “progressives” nowadays are willing to contribute millions of dollars – money that could instead be used to support peace and human rights activism – to support groups like Democracy for America and MoveOn in their efforts to keep re-electing hawkish politicians like Weiner.

The sensationalist coverage of the Weiner scandal says a lot about the sorry state of the media and American political culture. Unfortunately, the effort to defend this right-wing Congressman also says a lot about some segments of the American left.