

Debating Bolton on Embassy Closures

by [James Jeffrey \(/experts/james-jeffrey\)](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[James Jeffrey \(/experts/james-jeffrey\)](#)

Ambassador is a former U.S. special representative for Syria engagement and former U.S. ambassador to Turkey and Iraq; from 2013-2018 he was the Philip Solondz Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute. He currently chairs the Wilson Center's Middle East Program.



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In his [August 21 op-ed "It's Time to Choose Sides in Egypt."](#) (<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324108204579020851300268912.html>) John Bolton argues that the recent "closure" of American embassies in the Middle East signals that the U.S. cannot protect its citizens abroad. This is not correct. In fact, "closed" means nothing more than "closed to the public" but certainly not "shut down" or "abandoned." When "closed," embassies temporarily suspend their normal nonemergency service functions to local residents and American travelers. Various internal administrative activities typically done by locally employed staff are also canceled.

Even when closed, embassy work doesn't stop; it often accelerates. Embassies will always have security and communications personnel on board or on standby. Consular staffs keep contact with Americans, provide information on the situation and, if necessary, move them to safety. And all the while the "front office" will communicate constantly with Washington and local governments on security, the status of American citizens and the political situation. In essence, a closed embassy goes on a tactical footing, with routine functions curtailed, and the number of personnel and visitors potentially exposed to bullets and blast -- or capture -- dramatically cut. But of all the "closed" embassy's priorities, protecting our fellow Americans is job one. ❖

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