

Obama's Outreach to Muslims: Empty Rhetoric, Same Old Policies

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Global Research, June 08, 2009

8 June 2009

Region: [USA](#)

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As well as anyone, Edward Said understood the West's long-standing antipathy to Islam – reflected in Samuel Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations" article in the summer 1993 issue of Foreign Affairs and later a 1996 book.

He wrote that future conflicts won't be "primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural....the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future" – demagogically suggesting a benevolent, superior West confronting a belligerent, hostile, inferior Muslim world. In other words, good v. evil.

Said called him and others like him, "ignorant," a "clumsy writer," and an "inelegant thinker" using a "gimmick" to suggest a "war of the worlds" pitting good guys against bad ones.

Post-9/11, it was easier than ever for America to declare war on Islam, abroad and at home – a policy no different under Obama than for eight years under George Bush. Empty rhetoric changes nothing, in Cairo or elsewhere. Facts on the ground are clear, unequivocal, and hostile – in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Occupied Palestine. Also toward Iran, Syria, elected Hezbollah Lebanese officials, the legitimate Palestinian Hamas government, and targeted Muslim Americans at home – for their activism, prominence, charity, religion and ethnicity. It's the wrong time to be Muslim in America and most anywhere else in the world.

Around 1.5 billion Muslims want change and the basic respect they deserve. In the spirit of noted US civil rights activist, Fannie Lou Hamer, they're "sick and tired of being sick and tired," colonized and exploited, targeted and slaughtered, vilified as terrorists, occupied and oppressed, falsely charged, convicted, and sentenced in kangaroo-court proceedings, imprisoned and tortured, or viewed the way Edward Said explained in his noted book, "Culture and Imperialism" – as "the strange (inferior, Orient, East, them)" v. "the familiar (superior, Europe, West, us)." They deserve much better, yet remain a political target of choice.

Until that changes and high-sounding speeches become policy, empty rhetoric will fall on deaf ears. We've heard it before, yet the more things change, the more they stay the same under Democrat and Republican administrations.

Obama's Cairo speech was profoundly disingenuous, much like others past and more recently. He decried the "killing of innocent men, women, and children," yet US forces

slaughter them daily in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, and supply Israel with billions of dollars and the latest weapons and technology to commit slow-motion genocide against millions of Palestinians, deny their legitimate self-determination, and right of their refugees to return home as international law demands.

Also, Iraq and Afghanistan remain occupied, the former with unchanged troop levels for the duration if necessary and thousands more for the latter under a new commander, general Stanley McChrystal, known for his brutality as leader of the Pentagon's infamous Joint Special (death squad) Operations (JSO). No exiting timelines are in sight for either country. Human rights abuses and war crimes occur daily, and torture, extraordinary renditions, and military tribunals remain official US policies as they did under George Bush.

America is a serial aggressor and abuser of binding human rights laws. High-sounding rhetoric changes nothing. Obama claimed America "did not go (to Afghanistan) by choice, we went of necessity....we do not want to keep our troops in Afghanistan. We seek no military bases there....Iraq was a war of choice (but) I believe that the Iraqi people are ultimately better off without the tyranny of Saddam Hussein."

"Today, America has a dual responsibility: to help Iraq forge a better future – and leave Iraq to Iraqis. I have made it clear to the Iraqi people that we pursue no bases, and no claim on their territory or resources. Iraq's sovereignty is its own. That is why I ordered the removal of our combat brigades by next August (and) why we will honor our agreement with Iraq's democratically elected government to remove combat troops from Iraqi cities by July, (and) all our troops....by 2012."

Secret provisions in the Pentagon's 2008 Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) indicate otherwise. They flagrantly violate Iraqi sovereignty and authorize the building of permanent US bases, camps, and prisons inside the country. They immunize US forces, civilian security, and private contractors from criminal prosecution. They assure Iraqi "democracy" is illusory.

Their officials have no say over US operations, including incursions into other countries. They require Washington's approval before concluding any agreements with other countries. Key Iraqi ministries stay under US control, including defense, interior, and oil. No timeline is stipulated for America's withdrawal. Conditions depend on Iraqi force readiness, the removal of "security threats" in neighboring countries (namely, Iran, Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Hamas in Palestine), and national reconciliation (meaning a defeated resistance). Unacknowledged is that America is in Iraq to stay, and the same holds for Afghanistan.

The historical record shows what Obama won't say. America came to Japan in 1945 and South Korea in 1950, both close US allies, and remained there ever since. Obama plans the same fate for Iraq, Afghanistan and numerous other strategic countries where America intends permanent occupations towards its goal of "full spectrum dominance" globally, including by preemptive wars with first-strike nuclear weapons.

Obama also claimed he's "taking concrete actions to change course (and) unequivocally prohibited the use of torture" at a time the practice remains official policy and continues reprehensibly in US-run prisons, including Guantanamo, and secretly in ones in other nations doing our bidding.

Obama said nothing about the millions of Iraqi deaths, refugees, and mass human misery since the Gulf War, subsequent sanctions, and 2003 conflict. He ignored the destruction of

the “cradle of civilization,” subjugation of a sovereign state, and infliction of the same fate on Afghanistan. He declared his support for democracy, peace, human rights, mutual understanding, and social justice while bringing none to the region and backing its most reprehensible tyrants.

He declared an “unbreakable” bond with Israelis and demanded that Palestinians “must abandon violence.” He acknowledged “more than 60 years” of their pain and dislocation but was silent on its cause, the vast slaughter and destruction from Operation Cast Lead, the daily incursions in the West Bank and Gaza, the latter Territory under a medieval siege, and the viciousness of a rogue occupier bringing death, destruction, and human misery to a civilian population in violation of binding human rights laws and norms.

He referred to a “stalemate” pitting “two people with legitimate aspirations” against each other in conflict. “It is easy to point fingers,” he said, but “the only resolution (for peace is for) both sides” to accept a two-state solution as stipulated in “the road map” leading solely to isolated bantustans after Israel seizes all valued land, leaves worthless scrub patches behind, and ethnically cleanses large numbers of Palestinians to bordering countries if they’ll have them.

“The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements,” but supplies billions in aid to build them, opposes the legitimate right of Palestinian refugees to return home, backs the corrosiveness of a racist and belligerent Zionism, supports conflicts against an occupied people, and rogue Mahmoud Abbas Fatah elements to divide, conquer, and solidify Israeli hardline rule.

Obama mentioned nuclear weapons as another source of tension, “reaffirmed America’s commitment (for) a world” without them, acknowledged Iran’s right to “peaceful nuclear power,” ignored Israel’s nuclear arsenal (likely 200 – 400 warheads), and so far as known, Iran’s full compliance with NPT. America and Israel are nuclear outlaws. Israel is the region’s most destabilizing force. America has that “honor” globally.

Overall, Obama proposed no concrete measures to redress decades of Palestinian grievances, nor those of Iraqis, Afghans, Pakistanis, and others in Eurasia – the region America covets for its vast energy and other resource riches.

He came, saw, spoke, made empty gestures and no promises, except about America’s permanent imperial presence in partnership with Israeli rule. Obama puts a new face on long-standing policy, but no change of America’s global aim – for unchallengeable dominance in this resource-rich part of the world with hardline militarism for enforcement. The Arab street harbors few illusions that it’ll be otherwise going forward. Stay tuned.

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