

OBAMA'S CAIRO SPEECH



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For all the blistering that I, and many others here, give to Obama for his continuation of the Bush/Cheney duplicity on wiretapping, privacy, torture and Executive Branch primacy issues, there are similarly a great many areas in which he is so many light years ahead of where we have been moribund for the last eight years that it is hard to remember we are still in the same galaxy. This morning's speech in Cairo was one of those moments driving home the difference.

Spencer has posted the full text of the speech, and some good comment. Click the link and read the full text of the speech, it is well worth it.

It was a remarkable speech. This is a not just a speech that George Bush would not have given, but a speech he functionally *could not* have given; even with wordsmith speechwriters and handlers, he simply doesn't have the intellectual depth, greater worldview or oratorical skill to have pulled off what Obama did. If there is a hope for peaceful and productive coexistence with the Islamic world, and peace in the middle east, this speech will be the first linchpin of Obama's effort in that regard.

He was visionary:

No single speech can eradicate years of mistrust, nor can I answer in the time that I have all the complex questions that brought us to this point. But I am convinced that in order to move forward, we must say openly the things we hold in our hearts, and that too often are said only behind closed doors. There must be a sustained effort to listen to each other; to learn from each other; to respect one another; and to seek common

ground. As the Holy Koran tells us, "Be conscious of God and speak always the truth." That is what I will try to do – to speak the truth as best I can, humbled by the task before us, and firm in my belief that the interests we share as human beings are far more powerful than the forces that drive us apart.

He was challenging and proud of America:

But that same principle must apply to Muslim perceptions of America. Just as Muslims do not fit a crude stereotype, America is not the crude stereotype of a self-interested empire. The United States has been one of the greatest sources of progress that the world has ever known. We were born out of revolution against an empire. We were founded upon the ideal that all are created equal, and we have shed blood and struggled for centuries to give meaning to those words – within our borders, and around the world. We are shaped by every culture, drawn from every end of the Earth, and dedicated to a simple concept: E pluribus unum: "Out of many, one."

Humble, but unapologetic, as to our mistakes:

Let me also address the issue of Iraq. Unlike Afghanistan, Iraq was a war of choice that provoked strong differences in my country and around the world. Although I believe that the Iraqi people are ultimately better off without the tyranny of Saddam Hussein, I also believe that events in Iraq have reminded America of the need to use diplomacy and build international consensus to resolve our problems whenever possible. Indeed, we can recall the words of Thomas Jefferson, who said: "I hope that our wisdom will grow with

our power, and teach us that the less we use our power the greater it will be.”

But most of all, he played both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian issue like a Stradivarius:

Around the world, the Jewish people were persecuted for centuries, and anti-Semitism in Europe culminated in an unprecedented Holocaust. Tomorrow, I will visit Buchenwald, which was part of a network of camps where Jews were enslaved, tortured, shot and gassed to death by the Third Reich. Six million Jews were killed – more than the entire Jewish population of Israel today. Denying that fact is baseless, ignorant, and hateful. Threatening Israel with destruction – or repeating vile stereotypes about Jews – is deeply wrong, and only serves to evoke in the minds of Israelis this most painful of memories while preventing the peace that the people of this region deserve.

On the other hand, it is also undeniable that the Palestinian people – Muslims and Christians – have suffered in pursuit of a homeland. For more than sixty years they have endured the pain of dislocation. Many wait in refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza, and neighboring lands for a life of peace and security that they have never been able to lead. They endure the daily humiliations – large and small – that come with occupation. So let there be no doubt: the situation for the Palestinian people is intolerable. America will not turn our backs on the legitimate Palestinian aspiration for dignity, opportunity, and a state of their own.

Obama gave weight to both and tough love to each, you really have to read it all to get the effect, but the point is clear: Obama cares

about the middle east and he is going to make a strong play on middle east peace, on a retooled and equilibrated plane. It is a legitimate effort, and contrary to all the initial fears, Obama and his Secretary of State are, so far, on exactly the same page and slowly but surely setting the stage.

Obama hit on several other topics in Cairo including peace in the middle east above and beyond the I-P situation, nuclear weapons in the world, the will of the world's people and democracy, religious tolerance (noting specifically and candidly the pains of Muslim intolerance) and economic development and opportunity. Of particular significance were his words on women's rights:

I know there is debate about this issue. I reject the view of some in the West that a woman who chooses to cover her hair is somehow less equal, but I do believe that a woman who is denied an education is denied equality. And it is no coincidence that countries where women are well-educated are far more likely to be prosperous.

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Our daughters can contribute just as much to society as our sons, and our common prosperity will be advanced by allowing all humanity – men and women – to reach their full potential. I do not believe that women must make the same choices as men in order to be equal, and I respect those women who choose to live their lives in traditional roles. But it should be their choice. That is why the United States will partner with any Muslim-majority country to support expanded literacy for girls, and to help young women pursue employment through micro-financing that helps people live their dreams.

Considering the forum, and it coming hot on the heels of his time in Saudi Arabia, the support

for women's rights in Muslim lands are welcome and bold words. It is also something that both his Secretary of State and wife Michelle are focusing on too. It is a worthy effort.

Make no mistake, this was nothing more than a speech, and just one speech at that. But it was dignified, powerful and in a setting that conveyed the importance of the moment. We here in the US have quickly become used to seeing Obama and his soaring rhetoric, but this speech in Cairo will leave a mark and, from what I saw, a good one. And Obama, as is his style, is insuring mass saturation to the maximum market, especially through the modalities that will reach and affect youth. The early reports are that the response on these alternate modalities is huge; good, let the youth carry the message. The key is not how Obama's speech and visit plays here at home, but what lasting imprint it makes there. Again, I think it is going to leave a good mark.

Barack Obama's foreign policy surge, especially in the middle east, is still in its infancy, but it is a joy to watch so far. This truly is the hope we all sensed from Obama during the election. Hopefully today's Cairo speech, like the sun rising on the pyramids, is the dawn of a new interaction of the United States with the the middle east and Muslim world.