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**President Obama Changing Islam's Opinion of the US
African American Leadership**

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BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

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President Barack Obama's recent trip to the Middle East where he gave a speech in Cairo, Egypt was a triumph in his attempt to change the opinions of over 1.2 billion Muslims about the character of the United States. It was a bold and audacious attempt that was conceived to place America, probably for the first time in the eyes of Muslims, as an honest broker for peace and not so Israeli-centric that negotiations were over before they began.

I agree with Chris Matthews of MSNBC this time, who said that the people we have to worry about that will create terrorism against the United States are now youths, many of whom are aggrieved at the killing and maiming of their parents, the destruction of their homes by Israel or the United States and their lack of life options. But there is also the potential for a massive well of cooperation with the United States from other youths, based on the power of American popular culture, the pull of higher education, and the engine of economic growth. Which young Muslim will determine the nature of future alliances between the U.S. and the Middle East?

Barack Obama went to Cairo to answer this question by saying in effect that the U.S. must hold out its hand in peace and if the fist of Muslims is unclenched, there is a chance. But he also had to admit, like Bill Clinton did on his trip to Africa as President, that the U.S. had not always been on the right side of history. Then, as now, right wing radicals have called the President an apologist. In fact, here we have a president who has captured the attention of the entire Islamic world, whose speech has been translated into 12 languages, and who is roundly accepted on the Muslim street as a positive force. But we find the reluctance to accept this triumph of public diplomacy in

his own country.

In the U.S., many media analysts, instead of acknowledging an historic feat, have derided his receipt of a medal by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia (I have never seen pictures of medals given to American presidents before); he has been criticized by not using the word "terrorism" in his speech; some said the speech did not have one new policy proposal; and he has even been called an "apostate" (someone was a Muslim, but who has backslid). Most of this has come from neocons, like Daniel Pipes who during the campaign tried to say that Obama is still a Muslim, or Edward Luttwak who authored the "apostate" charge in an op ed piece in the New York Times. Why would the Times publish such a piece in the first place? Obama's goal was not to announce new policy, but to change the tone of American relations with the Muslim world and he could not do that by using the inference that all Muslims were "terrorist" or that there is "global war on terror."

The President was clear about the American position with respect to those who would seek to harm us, but without the baggage of the neocon-riddled Bush administration's ideology. The underlying concept, spelled out by Harvard Professor, Samuel Huntington was that we were experiencing a "Clash of Civilizations" between Islam and the West. Obama said straightforwardly that America was not and will never be at war with Islam; Bush said that too, to his credit, but it was not believable because he also included Muslim countries in his "Axis of evil."

Undoubtedly, the President will also be criticized by his view that Iran has a right to the use of peaceful nuclear power, under the scrutiny of the International Atomic Energy Agency. It is my view that neither America nor Israel will be able to stop the spread of nuclear capability in the Middle East; the view that only our guys can have it is fast losing currency in international affairs, no matter how many resolutions the US is able to wring out of the UN to the contrary. So, the way forward is to cooperate in aggressively helping to manage the spread and not to create a prohibition that is the basis for interminable sanctions or even military actions.


To the extent that Obama has taken the hardest line on the establishment of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, he has moved much farther into the middle as an honest broker. By doing so, he is also revealing that the key to Middle East peace is not solely located there, but to what extent his position will be supported at home. Barack Obama is the right person at the right time to have made this gesture of reconciliation, let's hope it is not messed up.

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