

Barackcracy: Obama's Cultural DNA and Diplomacy in "A New Beginning"

Dr. Zekeh S. Gbotokuma
Founder, Polyglots in Action for Diversity, Inc.
Associate Professor of Philosophy
Morgan State University
Email: Zekeh.Gbotokuma@morgan.edu

President Barack Obama's 'glocal' leadership - i.e., local or domestic and global ability to lead and negotiate - is not a pure accident of history. It must be understood in the full context of what Andrew Young, the former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, called Obama's "cultural DNA," or global family. Unarguably, this fact about the 44th U.S. President accounts, to some extent, for his relentless quest for, willingness and commitment to compromise and diplomatic solutions to some of today's global issues. "A New Beginning," or President Obama's Speech at Cairo's University, Egypt, showed the benefits of cultural understanding in the attempt to move the US-Muslim World relationship from a "clash of civilizations" to a dialogue of civilizations.¹

I. Obama's Cultural DNA or 'Global' Family

Obama's global understanding and propensity to building global bridges are the results of life circumstances such as education, community service, and, above all, the diversity of his family. In a picture book, the editors of *LIFE* describe Obama's complex family tree as follows:

In the history of melting pot that is the United States, there have surely been more complicated lineages than this one that descends to Barack Obama Jr. and his children. But among our nation's leaders, few have so exotically personified the notion that an American can come from anywhere, from any background or combination of backgrounds. The Obama family tree is not a slender birch, easy to follow from trunk to upper branch. It is a [...] complicated plant, more akin to the volatile Whomping Willow of the *Harry Potter* saga (*LIFE*, 2008, p. 20)

Obama's global understanding and glocal leadership are also the consequences of multicultural and multiethnic experiences that he has had due to those very circumstances. His black father, Barack Hussein Obama, Sr. was from Kenya. He earned a Ph.D. in economics from Harvard. He was often described as confident, domineering, smart, eloquent, and likeable, because to quote from Obama's *Dreams from My Father*, he "could handle just about any situation" (Obama, 1995/2004, p. 8-9). Apparently Obama matches many of his father's descriptions: confidence,

¹ This essay is based, mutatis mutandis, on chapters 1 and 4 of my book, *OBAMÆNON: The Gospel of 'Glocal' Change, Hope, Understanding, and Leadership for a networking World*. First published in Champaign, Illinois in 2011 by Common Ground Publishing LLC at On Globalization, a series imprint of The University Press. Copyright © Zekeh Sua Gbotokuma 2011. It is meant to commemorate the third anniversary of the Cairo Speech. Participants in the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy Symposium 2012 in Washington, DC and other readers will hopefully share my belief that this Speech is the fruit of cultural diplomacy par excellence.

smartness, eloquence, and likeability describe Obama pretty well. In this sense, one can say that his fatherless childhood has not erased his genetic makeup. This situation is in agreement with the sayings, “Like father, like son;” and “When you follow in the path of your father, you learn to walk like him.” In Hawaii, Mr. Stanley Dunham, Obama’s white grandfather, had confirmed Obama Sr.’s confidence as follows, “Now there’s something you can learn from your dad [...] Confidence. The secret to a man’s success” (p. 8).

Obama’s white mother – Stanley Ann Dunham - was from Kansas. She was described, among others, as someone who “traveled the world, working in the distant villages of Asia and Africa, helping women buy a sewing machine or a milk cow or an education that might give them a foothold in the world’s economy” (Obama, 1995/2004, p. xi). This racially diverse family background was the cause of an identity crisis for Obama. However, it also allowed him, as Obama put it in *Dreams from My Father*, “to slip back and forth between my black and white worlds, understanding that each possessed its own language and customs and structures of meaning, convinced that with a bit of translation on my part the two worlds would eventually cohere” (p. 82).

Obama was raised by his white grandparents – Madelyn L. Payne and Stanley A. Dunham - in Hawaii, a diverse state where 21% of the population is “*Hapa*,” or half and half, i.e. coming from mixed marriages. Obama was educated in some of the best institutions of higher education in the United States, i.e. Occidental College in Los Angeles, Columbia University in New York, and Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. His wife Michelle Obama is also referred to as one who “carries within her the blood of slaves and slave owners [...]” Obama has “brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles and cousins, of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents...” This genetic makeup allows Obama to extend the meaning of “*E pluribus unum*” or “Out of many, one” to the whole world, thereby reminding us of our common humanity. Obama’s global genome – coupled with early intercultural experiences and Ivy League education – has been a crucial factor in his rise to global stardom and leadership.

As a child, Obama was exposed to diverse cultural experiences through international travel. He lived in Indonesia for over three years with his mother, Indonesian stepfather, and step-sister. In *The Audacity of Hope*, we learn that in Indonesia, Obama “went to local Indonesian schools and ran the streets with the children of farmers, servants, tailors, and clerks” (Obama, 2006, p. 274). That is why TIME magazine editors say that, “His genome is global, his mind is innovative, his world is networked.”²

In *Dreams from My Father*, Obama states that upon arrival in Jakarta with his mother and stepfather, he, as a child, had the opportunity to discover the limits of English as a global lingua franca. He discovered that, “People swirled around us, speaking rapidly in a language I didn’t know, smelling unfamiliar” (Obama, 1995/2004, p. 32). So, to some extent, there is a connection between the little Barry’s Indonesian experience and the Cairo Speech, “A New Beginning,”³

II. The Power Of Truth And Cultural Understanding

² See “Barack Obama: The 2008 TIME Person of the Year.” *TIME*, December 29, 2008 / January 5, 2009, p. 64. For additional information, please refer to Gbotokuma, 2011, Chapter 1, “Foundations of the Obamænon,” pp. 1-10.

³ Cairo University, Cairo, Egypt, June 4, 2009. The original text is the one released by The White House, Office of the Press Secretary. See also Gbotokuma, 2011, Chapter 4, “Glocal Change, Hope, Understanding, and Leadership in the Cairo Speech, A New Beginning,” pp. 47-61.

President Obama's election has been a reason for hope and jubilation in most of the world. It is expected to transform local or domestic election campaign mottos – CHANGE We Can Believe in/ Yes We Can! – into a global reality. "A New Beginning," the title of Obama's remark at Cairo University, Egypt, is just another phrase for one of his favorite words, i.e., change. Change especially in the U.S.-Muslim world relations. Change in the way we live in our interconnected world as well as change in our approaches to key issues which, in one way or another affect all of us. The collapse of communism in the former Soviet Union has allowed the United States to remain, at least so far, the only superpower. For eight years, under President George W. Bush, the exercise of power was more characterized by a reaffirmation of American Exceptionalism, unilateralism, militarism, monopolarity, self-interest, and patronizing rather than by multilateralism, diplomacy, multipolarity, mutual interest, and partnership. The September 11th, 2001 attacks on the United States have justified its war in Afghanistan as a war of necessity, i.e., a self-defense war. As a matter of fact, there was a lot of sympathy with the United States. There was understanding toward the U.S. even from countries that were not necessarily part of what President George. W. Bush called "the coalition of the willing." But the war in Iraq was a war of choice and supposedly a preemptive war. It was supported neither by the evidence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), nor by Saddam Hussein's involvement with the terrorist attacks. The Iraq war has alienated many countries, including even key allies such as France and others. More importantly, the Iraq war has worsened the relations between the US and the Muslim world. The scandalous mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners at Abughraib and the water boarding/torture of detainees at Guantanamo Bay have undermined the U.S. global leadership. It has taken Barack Hussein Obama, the first African American President with a Muslim middle name, for the world to see a sea change in the United States' foreign policy and to believe in it again. While President Obama's first official travels and speeches in Europe in April 2009 -- at the G-20 Summit in London, UK; at the European Parliament in Strasburg, France; in the Czech Republic, and at the Turkish Parliament in Ankara -- were about listening, learning, leading, and winning back key allies, the Cairo travel and speech were about winning the hearts and minds of the Muslims and Arabs worldwide. The speech was a crucial test and proof of Obama's global leadership potential for a new beginning. It was yet another manifestation of his audacity of hope and sincere commitment to transform the world. His diverse background allowed him to effectively connect with a global audience and to make him credible and likeable. His likeability was apparent when,

during the speech, someone from the audience shouted, “Barack Obama, we love you!” Below are some excerpts from, and analysis of “A New Beginning.”

From the very beginning of the speech, Obama showed his global leadership and cultural understanding through a bilingual greeting in English and Arabic, the language of the Holy Koran and a widely used lingua franca in the Muslim world. The greeting of peace - *Assalaamu alaykum* – was greatly appreciated through a big applause from the audience. This first applause was followed by many others.

Acknowledging the US-Muslim World situation, President Obama stated that the Cairo meeting took place “at a time of great tension between the United States and Muslims around the world -- The relationship between Islam and the West includes centuries of coexistence and cooperation, but also conflict and religious wars.” With reference to the perceived clash of civilizations and a suspicion-ridden coexistence, he noted that on the one hand, the sweeping change brought by modernity and globalization led many Muslims to view the West as hostile to the traditions of Islam. On the other hand, the attacks of September 11, 2001 have led the US to view Islam as inevitably hostile not only to America and Western countries, but also to human rights.

A. “A New Beginning” as Seeking Common Ground by Speaking the Truth

“A New Beginning” was an attempt to put an end to the cycle of suspicion, discord, and hatred; to seek common ground and cooperation, which must be based on mutual interest and respect; a common ground that is possible only by speaking the truth. This requires that “we must say openly to each other 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; [...] But as the French saying puts it, “*La vérité blesse*” (Truth hurts). As an effective speaker with intercultural communication skills, President Obama managed to convince his Muslim audience to accept and believe in the healing power of truth by quoting from Islam’s Holy Koran, “Be conscious of God and speak always the truth,” thereby winning another applause and receiving the permission to possibly tell the whole truth, hopefully without hurting anybody.

B. Diversity Matters: The Power and Benefits of Obama's Background

Throughout the speech, Obama's global background, knowledge of Islam in three continents, lived experience, and networked world allowed him to communicate his message in a way that – to the best of my knowledge - no U.S. president had ever been able to do before.

I'm a Christian, but my father came from a Kenyan family that includes generations of Muslims. As a boy, I spent several years in Indonesia and heard the call of the azaan at the break of dawn and at the fall of dusk. As a young man, I worked in Chicago communities where many found dignity and peace in their Muslim faith.

With these words, Obama convinced the audience of the fact that his quasi global citizenship, biracial identity, faith, and family connection to Islam gave him the authority to tackle international, interracial, and ecumenical or interreligious issues.

III. GENERAL ISSUES

A. Addressing the Eurocentric View of History and Acknowledging Civilization's Debt to Islam

One of the problems referred to as the clash of civilizations arises from the arrogant and Eurocentric view of history that has for so long considered the Muslim religion and culture as backward, intolerant, and racist. Obama addressed that problem by acknowledging civilization's debt to Islam.

It was Islam -- at places like Al-Azhar -- that carried the light of learning through so many centuries, paving the way for Europe's Renaissance and Enlightenment. It was innovation in Muslim communities [...] that developed the order of algebra; our magnetic compass and tools of navigation; our mastery of pens and printing; our understanding of how disease spreads and how it can be healed. Islamic culture has given us [...] timeless poetry and cherished music; elegant calligraphy and places of peaceful contemplation. And throughout history, Islam has demonstrated through words and deeds the possibilities of religious tolerance and racial equality.

Zakaria (2009) stresses the relevance of this acknowledgment by stating that for the first centuries of the second millennium, the East was ahead of the West by almost every measure.

With respect to civilization's debt to Islam, Zakaria explains that the Middle East was at the forefront of civilization. Building on Greek and Roman knowledge, it produced path breaking work in mathematics, physics, medicine, anthropology, and psychology. Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3,) and the concept of zero were invented there. He notes that the word 'algebra' comes from the title of a book, *Al-Jabr wa-al Muqabilah*, by an Arab scholar. He also reminds us of the fact that the word 'algorithm' derives from the scholar's name. On the military side, the Ottomans expanded their empire by battling Western states in Central Asia and Europe until the seventeenth century. So who knows, what happened once could happen again.

B. Establishing a Rapprochement Between USA and the Muslim World

Moreover, there was no better way to establish a rapprochement between USA and the Muslim world than through some relevant historical facts. So Obama reminded the audience of some facts which illustrate that Islam has always been a part of America's story. For example, the first nation to recognize the United States was Morocco, a Muslim and northern African country. What's more, and this is of utmost importance, in signing the Treaty of Tripoli in 1796, the second U.S. President, John Adams, wrote, "The United States has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquility of Muslims." In addition to acknowledging civilization's debt to Islam, President Obama also acknowledged the fact that since the U.S. founding, American Muslims have enriched the United States. He also mentioned the fact that when the first Muslim American was recently elected to the U.S. Congress, he took the oath to defend the U.S. Constitution using the same Holy Koran that President Thomas Jefferson kept in his personal library.

C. Partnership and Mutual Respect

A new beginning is about partnership between the United States of America and Islam, one that must be based on what Islam is, not what it isn't; and one that is free from negative stereotypes on both sides. President Obama stated that just as Muslims do not fit a crude stereotype, America is not the crude stereotype of a self-interested empire. In order to understand what Obama means

by “self-interested empire,” it is necessary to digress and take a quick look at the Persian Gulf oil and the U.S. foreign policy, because, believe it or not, oil matter..

D. Oil and Israel as the Main Reasons for the Middle East/Muslim World’s Hostility Toward USA

According to Sheldon Richman (1991), after 70 years of broken Western promises regarding Arab independence, it should not be surprising that the West is viewed with suspicion and hostility by the populations of the Middle East. As the heir to British imperialism in the region, the United States has been caught in crises in the Middle East and elsewhere. In the light of the Iraqi crisis, this problem is very likely to stay for years to come. Consequently, the United States has also been looked upon with suspicion. Securing Iraq’s oil fields and resources ranked number seven on the list of the justifications for the Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). However, the truth is that after the World War II, the Middle East has become a primary object of the U.S. foreign policy, mainly because of oil. Richman (1991) expresses this truth by stating that “if the chief natural resource of the Middle East were bananas, then the region would not have attracted the attention of U.S. policymakers as it has for decades.” Oil made policymakers realize that the Middle East was “a stupendous source of strategic power, and one of the greatest material prizes in world history” (Government Printing, 1945, p. 45).

The conclusion of Richman’s analysis is that democracy, restoration of legitimate government of Kuwait, the creation of a “new world order,” humanitarianism, weapons of mass destruction (if found), terrorism, etc., are not the main reasons for the U.S. interventionist foreign policy in the region, especially Operation Desert Storm (ODS) and OIF. The main reason is, according to Richman (1991):

A desire to keep the vast oil reserves in hands friendly to the United States. [...]. Nearly everything the United States has done in the Middle East can be understood as contributing to the protection of its long-term access to Middle Eastern oil and, through that control, Washington's claim to world leadership. The U.S. build-up of Israel and Iran as powerful gendarmeries beholden to the United States, and U.S. aid given to "moderate," pro-Western Arab regimes, such as those in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Jordan, were intended to keep the region in friendly hands. That was always the meaning of the term 'regional stability' (Government Printing Office, 1977, p. 83).

According to the report of the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, chaired in 1977 by Sen. Henry Jackson, "threats to the continuous flow of oil through the Gulf would so endanger the Western and Japanese economies as to be grounds for general war" (p. 83). In the 1970s, the foreign policy analyst Robert W. Tucker (1980-81) advocated that the United States take over the Middle Eastern oil fields militarily, because, he wrote, "It is the Gulf that forms the indispensable key to the defense of the American global position" (p. 256). The Gulf oil was an important part of the U.S. foreign policy even before Tucker's statement. For example, during the Lebanese crisis in 1958, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles said that the United States,

must regard Arab nationalism as a flood which is running strongly. We cannot successfully oppose it, but we could put sand bags around positions we must protect—the first group being Israel and Lebanon and the second being the oil positions around the Persian Gulf (Qtd in Bishku, 1980-81, pp. 116-17).

During World War II, Loy Henderson, who was in charge of Near Eastern affairs for the State Department, said, "There is a need for stronger role for this government in the economics and political destinies of the Near and Middle East, especially in view of the oil reserves" (Qtd in Yergin, 1978, p. 180). These are some of the historical facts that have contributed to the stereotype of the United States as a self-interested empire.

E. USA as the Land of the Free

Obama stressed the fact that America is the land of the free, the land of hope and opportunity where “an African American with the name Barack Hussein Obama could be elected President.” America is a country where the promise of the American dream for all people exists for all who come to its shores, including nearly 7 million American Muslims who enjoy incomes and educational levels that are higher than the American average. In many countries religious minorities cannot worship freely. That is why some people left their countries to live in USA, where,

freedom is indivisible from the freedom to practice one's religion. That is why there is a mosque in every state in our union, and over 1,200 mosques within our borders. That's why the United States government has gone to court to protect the right of women and girls to wear the hijab and to punish those who would deny it.

Unarguably, this was a way for Obama to invite other less religiously tolerant countries to change in order to peacefully live in a new and shrinking world.

F. One World, One Humanity, Common Hope, and Common Challenges

Despite the progress made in terms of peoples' coexistence and human rights, there are still many people who do not share the belief that all humans are created equal. Consequently, they act like some people have or should have more rights and dignity than others. It takes global leadership to proclaim as Obama did, that regardless of race, gender, religion, or station in life, all of us share the same humanity and dignity. Therefore, we must be aware of the fact that we also have common hope, aspirations, and challenges; that we live in a shrinking and interconnected world. Obama gave a few illustrations.

...when a financial system weakens in one country, prosperity is hurt everywhere. When a new flu infects one human being, all are at risk. When one nation pursues a nuclear weapon, the risk of nuclear attack rises for all nations. When violent extremists operate in one stretch of mountains, people are endangered across an ocean. When innocents in Bosnia and Darfur are slaughtered, that is a stain on our collective conscience.

These illustrations invite us to be our brothers' and sisters' keepers. It is a call for universal brotherhood and sisterhood, or universal humanism à la Césaire. Indeed, in the book, *Et les Chiens se Taisaient* (1956), Aimé Césaire (1913-2008) - the Martinican poet and co-founder of the Negritude movement - stated, through the rebel's words, that whenever a poor guy was lynched, and whenever a poor person was tortured, it was him who was assassinated and humiliated.

G. Interdependence in an Interconnected World

Our survival in an interconnected world requires that we give up the will to power, acknowledge our interdependence, overcome the negativities of the past, change our attitudes, move forward, and behave like true partners. In Obama's words:

[...] For human history has often been a record of nations and tribes -- and, yes, religions -- subjugating one another in pursuit of their own interests. Yet in this new age, such attitudes are self-defeating. Given our interdependence, any world order that elevates one nation or group of people over another will inevitably fail. So whatever we think of the past, we must not be prisoners to it. Our problems must be dealt with through partnership; our progress must be shared.

IV. SIX SPECIFIC ISSUES THAT WE MUST CONFRONT

A new beginning, glocal leadership, and the duty to speak the truth led President Obama to tackle six specific issues that he believed we must confront together, namely, violent extremism, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, nuclear weapons, democracy, religious freedom, and economic development and opportunity.

A. Issue Number One: Violent Extremism

The first issue Obama tackled was the violent extremism. Consistent with a statement that he made on his inaugural day, i.e., January 20, 2009, and which he also repeated during his address to the Turkish Parliament in Ankara, President Obama made clear once again in Cairo, that "America is not -- and never will be -- at war with Islam." He skillfully justified the United States global war on terrorism based on the self-defense principle as well as on a widespread common religious and ethical belief in the duty to respect innocents even in war situations. He said, "... we reject the same thing that people of all faiths reject: the killing of innocent men,

women, and children.” Obama’s and America’s rejection of violent extremism is not only because of the 3,000 innocent people whom Al Qaeda killed on September 11, 2001, but also because it has killed people of many different countries and faiths, including Muslims. This modus operandi is at odds with human rights and civilizations. What is more, it is un-Islamic because, as Obama reminded his audience, Islam is about “promoting peace.” Moreover, “The Holy Koran teaches that whoever kills an innocent [...], it is as if he has killed all mankind. And the Holy Koran also says whoever saves a person, it is as if he has saved all mankind.”

To show leadership in the global war on terrorism and extremism in Afghanistan and elsewhere, the United States must partner with many other countries. The Iraq “war of choice” must help the United States appreciate the importance of diplomacy and building international consensus in the effort to resolve problems. Despite the moral and legal justification for the American war in Afghanistan, Obama understands the need for combining hard power with soft power, or power with wisdom, sticks and carrots. He rightfully recalled 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." Deep in his heart, Obama knows as many people do, that, “military power alone is not going to solve the problems in Afghanistan and Pakistan.” In the past, British and Russians had used military power, but they were unsuccessful in Afghanistan. That's why the Obama administration plans,

to invest \$1.5 billion each year over the next five years to partner with Pakistanis to build schools and hospitals, roads and businesses, and hundreds of millions to help those who've been displaced. That's why we are providing more than \$2.8 billion to help Afghanis develop their economy and deliver services that people depend on.

The late Pope Paul VI’s words in the encyclical “*Populorum Progressio*” are still applicable today, i.e., “development is the new name of peace” [*lo sviluppo è il nuovo nome della pace*, in Italian]. Only through effective international development programs can the United States win the hearts and minds of the Afghanis and Pakistanis.

Five years after the United States – under President Bush - supposedly handed over the full sovereignty to the Iraqis (June 28, 2004), President Obama announced, once again, America’s dual responsibility: “to help Iraq forge a better future -- and to leave Iraq to Iraqis.”

Acting on his words, Obama ordered the withdrawal of U.S. troops from major Iraqi cities on June 30, 2009, thereby turning the security responsibilities to Iraqis. His promise to “support a secure and united Iraq as a partner, and never as a patron” was particularly important. As a matter of fact, it is believed that the US occupation of Iraq has brought more Al Qaeda members into that country than ever before. Moreover, many Arab and Muslim countries dislike the occupation of a Muslim country by a western power or by “infidels.” The humiliating treatment of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib and the water boarding of detainees at Guantanamo Bay have caused the United States to lose its moral authority and leadership in the human rights area. So it was a great move by Obama to not only reject human rights violations by extremists, but also – consistent with his commitment to speak the truth – to unequivocally condemn and prohibit the use of torture by the United States, and to have ordered the closure of the Guantanamo Bay prison through his very first executive order.

B. Issue Number Two: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The second issue, which is a major source of tension between the United States and the Muslim world, is the situation between Israelis, Palestinians and the Arab world. Many US presidents have addressed this issue without reaching any satisfactory agreement. The deadlock is due, among other reasons, to the perceived partiality among key peace negotiators, including the United States. A new beginning in this area would be impossible without diplomatically and sincerely speaking the truth about both sides. Acknowledging the strong and unbreakable bonds between the United States and Israel, Obama invited the audience to acknowledge anti-Semitism and Holocaust under Germany’s Third Reich, which resulted in the enslavement, torture, and death of six million Jews. Some people – including President Mahmud Ahmadinejad of Iran - continue to deny that historical fact. On the other hand, Obama also acknowledged the Palestinian people’s suffering, dislocation, and daily humiliations in pursuit of a homeland. It was particularly important - in the long attempt to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – to clearly declare that “the situation for the Palestinian people is intolerable. And America will not turn our backs on the legitimate Palestinian aspiration for dignity, opportunity, and a state of their own.” The best possible approach to this problem consists of recognizing, as Obama did, the fact that both Israelis and Palestinians have legitimate aspirations to a homeland. Consequently, Obama noted that past failures to resolve the problem were because of finger

pointing and partiality. In other words, “we see this conflict only from one side or the other,” said Obama, and we remain blind to the truth:

The only resolution is for the aspirations of both sides to be met through two states, where Israelis and Palestinians each live in peace and security. That is in Israel's interest, Palestine's interest, America's interest, and the world's interest. [...]. For peace to come, it is time for them -- and all of us -- to live up to our responsibilities.

Drawing a lesson from the American, South African, South Asian, Eastern European, and Indonesian experiences, Obama urged Palestinians to abandon violence, which is a dead end. He reminded Hamas of its responsibilities to play a constructive role in fulfilling Palestinian aspirations, to unify the Palestinian people, recognize past agreements, including Israel's right to exist.

Resistance through violence and killing is wrong and it does not succeed. For centuries, black people in America suffered the lash of the whip as slaves and the humiliation of segregation. But it was not violence that won full and equal rights. It was a peaceful and determined insistence upon the ideals at the center of America's founding. [...]. It is a sign neither of courage nor power to shoot rockets at sleeping children, or to blow up old women on a bus. That's not how moral authority is claimed; that's how it is surrendered.

In an attempt to be impartial in addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Obama urged Israelis to stop their occupation and illegitimate settlements.

[...] Israelis must acknowledge that just as Israel's right to exist cannot be denied, neither can Palestine's. The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements. This construction violates previous agreements and undermines efforts to achieve peace. It is time for these settlements to stop. [...]. Just as it devastates Palestinian families, the continuing humanitarian crisis in Gaza does not serve Israel's security; neither does the continuing lack of opportunity in the West Bank.

Using a powerful conflict resolution language and stressing the common religious origin of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Obama concluded his perspective on the Israeli-Palestinian situation by reminding the audience of Isra's story:

Too many tears have been shed. Too much blood has been shed. All of us have a responsibility to work for the day when the mothers of Israelis and Palestinians

can see their children grow up without fear; when the Holy Land of the three great faiths is the place of peace that God intended it to be; when Jerusalem is a secure and lasting home for Jews and Christians and Muslims, and a place for all of the children of Abraham to mingle peacefully together as in the story of Isra,[...] when Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed, peace be upon them, joined in prayer.

C. Issue Number Three: Nuclear Weapons

The third issue is relative to our shared interest in the rights and responsibilities of nations on nuclear weapons. This issue has been a source of tension between the United States and Iran. Consistent with his commitment to move forward and to collaborate based on mutual respect and interests, Obama made it clear that “This is not simply about America's interests. It's about preventing a nuclear arms race in the Middle East that could lead this region and the world down a hugely dangerous path.” Touching on the key problem, he “reaffirmed America's commitment to seek a world in which no nations hold nuclear weapons.” For those countries like Iran and others who have the nuclear power, Obama exhorted them to use it for peaceful ends and in compliance with their responsibilities under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (1968). However, what is problematic is the fact that according to the treaty, a country that had nuclear weapons in 1968 is entitled to keep it; but any country that developed them later is an outlaw. Many countries complain about the fact that, “The USA goes around the world telling countries that a few more nuclear warheads are dangerous and immoral – while holding on to thousands of nuclear weapons of its own” (Zakaria, 2009, p. 159). It is an understatement to say that one of Obama’s numerous global leadership challenges is to ensure that the USA leads by example. On July 5, 2009, Presidents Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev of Russia discussed arms control. They confidently and cautiously committed to a year-end deal to slash nuclear stockpiles by about a third. Concretely, the two countries have agreed that each of them must reduce strategic warheads to a range of 1500 to 1675, and strategic delivery vehicles to a range of 500 to 1,100. But will this agreement signify willingness to amend the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty? The whole world is watching. Obama also showed his leadership in this area through the signing of the New START Treaty in Prague and by hosting the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, DC.⁴

D. Issue Number Four: Democracy

⁴ See Chapter 14, Section VI, “Going Nuclear and Obama’s Leadership.”

The fourth issue that Obama addressed was democracy. He did it in a country or region that is not so democratic. His audacity to address the issue in this region is certainly what led an audience member to shout, “Barack Obama, we love you.” In many authoritarian and undemocratic countries, a common person would not dare criticize dictators. What is more, many so-called friendly dictators have governed with the blessing of the industrialized democracies. Obama recognized nations’ right to self-determination, which entails the right to adopt and adapt democracy to peoples’ particular circumstances. However, that did not prevent him from sharing his,

unyielding belief that all people yearn for certain things: the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice; government that is transparent and doesn't steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose.

Taking a human rights approach to democracy, Obama said that these things are not just American ideas; they are human rights and as such they are universal. And that is why the USA will support them everywhere. Obama voiced another interesting criticism of dictators when he stated that there are some who advocate for democracy only when they're out of power; once in power, they are ruthless in suppressing the rights of others. In this section of the speech, which sounded like a genuine workshop on democratic governance, Obama provides examples of to-do-things for there to be a democracy anywhere:

You must maintain your power through consent, not coercion; you must respect the rights of minorities, and participate with a spirit of tolerance and compromise; you must place the interests of your people and the legitimate workings of the political process above your party.

The United States has not always been consistent with its commitment to spread democracy around the world. The inconsistency has been seen in its relationship with “friendly dictators,” especially during the Cold War. The U.S. global leadership in this area is undermined whenever it turns a blind eye on autocratic regimes. That is why Chinese leaders continue to ignore Washington’s criticism of their human rights bad records, because the U.S. often talks the talk, but does not always walk the walk. So one hears Chinese leaders’ statements such as, “When you tell us that we support a dictatorship in Sudan to have access to its oil, [...], what I want to say is, ‘and how is that different from your support for a medieval monarchy in Saudi Arabia?’ We see

the hypocrisy, we just don't say anything yet" (Zakaria, 2009, p. 35). One may respond to Chinese by saying that two wrongs don't make a right. So now that we know that the rule of the double negatives doesn't apply to ethical and legal issues and that two wrongs are twice wrong, shouldn't powerful nations show leadership by audaciously questioning the national interest principle? Will the United States lead, since China feels that it has to economically catch up with the United States by any means necessary? Will the Obama administration be willing to sacrifice some of the U.S. national interests during today's challenging economic times?

E. Issue Number Five: Religious Freedom

The fifth issue that Obama addressed was religious freedom. Religion is not only, as Karl Marx (1843/1976) put it, "the opium of the masses." It has also been -- due to pluralism that so often characterizes it -- a great source of conflicts. Consequently, a peaceful coexistence among humans everywhere is almost impossible without religious freedom, which is under fire, not only in Muslim countries, but also in western countries. In the USA, for example, Obama had to convince many people that he was not a Muslim to make himself a viable candidate for the presidency. The Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney did not win the nomination of his party because, among other things, he was a Mormon. Liberalism, separation of state and church, and French universalism prevent Muslim women to dress according to their tradition in public schools, etc. In "A New Beginning," Obama has shown his global leadership by addressing the problem of religious intolerance in an impartial and diplomatic way. He said:

Islam has a proud tradition of tolerance. We see it in the history of Andalusia and Cordoba during the Inquisition. I saw it firsthand as a child in Indonesia, where devout Christians worshiped freely in an overwhelmingly Muslim country. That is the spirit we need today. [...] Among some Muslims, there's a disturbing tendency to measure one's own faith by the rejection of somebody else's faith. The richness of religious diversity must be upheld -- whether it is for Maronites in Lebanon or the Copts in Egypt. And if we are being honest, fault lines must be closed among Muslims, as well, as the divisions between Sunni and Shia have led to tragic violence, particularly in Iraq... Likewise, it is important for Western countries to avoid impeding Muslim citizens from practicing religion as they see fit -- for instance, by dictating what clothes a Muslim woman should wear. We can't disguise hostility towards any religion behind the pretense of liberalism.

He encouraged interfaith dialogue and he urged his audience to show their faith through humanitarian actions. Noting that faith should bring us together, Obama mentioned several positive things done or to be done through religion.

And that's why we're forging service projects in America to bring together Christians, Muslims, and Jews. That's why we welcome efforts like Saudi Arabian King Abdullah's interfaith dialogue and Turkey's leadership in the Alliance of Civilizations. Around the world, we can turn dialogue into interfaith service, so bridges between peoples lead to action -- whether it is combating malaria in Africa, or providing relief after a natural disaster.

Another issue that Obama addressed was women's rights. This issue, like democracy, is one of the human rights areas where the Muslim world receives a lot of criticisms from the western world. Obama's global leadership and his determination to speak the truth were apparent in several areas. He acknowledged that the western way is not the only way; that some Muslim countries have done a much better job than many western countries; that gender equality and equal educational opportunity are a requirement for our common prosperity. He announced the necessity for the United States and any Muslim country to partner in order to improve women's conditions.

... 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. [...]. Now, let me be clear: Issues of women's equality are by no means simply an issue for Islam. In Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, we've seen Muslim-majority countries elect a woman to lead. [...] I am convinced that our daughters can contribute just as much to society as our sons. Our common prosperity will be advanced by allowing all humanity -- men and women -- to reach their full potential. [...] 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.

F. Issue Number Six: Economic Development and Opportunity

The sixth equally important issue that president Obama discussed in Cairo was economic development and opportunity. Since today's world economy is closely related to globalization, Obama addressed both the negative and positive aspects of globalization. He exhorted the

audience to overcome legitimate fears and seek a common ground in today's shared and interdependent world through global education, science, technology, and innovation as well as by balancing modernity and tradition. Obama talked about his agenda or action plan in the areas of education, economic development, science and technology.

I know that for many, the face of globalization is contradictory. The Internet and television can bring knowledge and information, but also offensive sexuality and mindless violence into the home. Trade can bring new wealth and opportunities, but also huge disruptions and change in communities. In all nations -- including America -- this change can bring fear. Fear that because of modernity we lose control over our economic choices, our politics, and most importantly our identities [...].

But I also know that human progress cannot be denied. There need not be contradictions between development and tradition. Countries like Japan and South Korea grew their economies enormously while maintaining distinct cultures....

And this is important because no development strategy can be based only upon what comes out of the ground, nor can it be sustained while young people are out of work. Many Gulf states have enjoyed great wealth as a consequence of oil, and some are beginning to focus it on broader development. But all of us must recognize that education and innovation will be the currency of the 21st century and in too many Muslim communities, there remains underinvestment in these areas.

On education, we will expand exchange programs, and increase scholarships, like the one that brought my father to America. At the same time, we will encourage more Americans to study in Muslim communities. And we will match promising Muslim students with internships in America; invest in online learning for teachers and children around the world; and create a new online network, so a young person in Kansas can communicate instantly with a young person in Cairo.

On economic development, we will create a new corps of business volunteers to partner with counterparts in Muslim-majority countries.

On science and technology, we'll open centers of scientific excellence in Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia, and appoint new science envoys to collaborate on programs that develop new sources of energy, create green jobs, digitize records, clean water, grow new crops..."

In conclusion, Obama stressed the importance of partnership, overcoming the past, reimagining and remaking the world we seek and share, finding a common ground, applying the golden rule, recognizing and respecting our common humanity, and making a new beginning based on some of the words written in the Holy Koran, Talmud, and the Bible.

The issues that I have described will not be easy to address. But we have a responsibility to join together on behalf of the world that we seek -- a world where extremists no longer threaten our people, and American troops have come home; a world where Israelis and Palestinians are each secure in a state of their own, and nuclear energy is used for peaceful purposes; a world where governments serve their citizens, and the rights of all God's children are respected. Those are mutual interests. That is the world we seek. But we can only achieve it together.

I know there are many -- Muslim and non-Muslim -- who question whether we can forge this new beginning. ... There's so much fear, so much mistrust that has built up over the years. But if we choose to be bound by the past, we will never move forward. And I want to particularly say this to young people of every faith, in every country -- you, more than anyone, have the ability to reimagine the world, to remake this world.

All of us share this world for but a brief moment in time. The question is whether we spend that time focused on what pushes us apart, or whether we commit ourselves to an effort -- a sustained effort -- to find common ground, to focus on the future we seek for our children, and to respect the dignity of all human beings.

It's easier to start wars than to end them. It's easier to blame others than to look inward. It's easier to see what is different about someone than to find the things we share. But we should choose the right path, not just the easy path. There's one rule that lies at the heart of every religion [THE GOLDEN RULE] -- that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. This truth transcends nations and peoples -- a belief that isn't new; that isn't black or white or brown; that isn't Christian or Muslim or Jew. It's a belief that pulsed in the cradle of civilization, and that still beats in the hearts of billions around the world. It's a faith in other people, and it's what brought me here today.

We have the power to make the world we seek, but only if we have the courage to make a new beginning, keeping in mind what has been written.

The Holy Koran tells us: "O mankind! We have created you male and a female; and we have made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another." The Talmud tells us: "The whole of the Torah is for the purpose of promoting peace." The Holy Bible tells us: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

The people of the world can live together in peace. We know that is God's vision. Now that must be our work here on Earth....

In a nutshell, "A New Beginning" is another phrase for "change" and "hope" for a better future coexistence. It is an audacious speech that challenges the U.S., the Muslim world, and others to overcome the negative past; move from the clash of civilizations to the alliance of civilizations; stop violence that has caused too much bloodshed and tears; stop pointing fingers and blame games; assume our collective responsibilities and show impartiality in an honest attempt to

resolve international conflicts; seek a common ground as well as racial and gender equality; acknowledge our common humanity and treat all humans with dignity and respect; cooperate on mutual interests and a better future for all; join together as partners in building the world we seek; speak the truth; act on our faith; and more important, adopt the golden rule as a guidance in our daily dealings.

The Cairo speech was received very well. This positive reception was apparent in the great number of applause. In the post-Bush world there is a great yearning for the U.S. global leadership. Throughout his speech, Obama – “a globe-trotting, multi-ethnic American with a Muslim father and the middle name of Hussein” (Zakaria, 2009, p. xxviii) - proved that he had what it takes to be a glocal leader: diplomacy, multilateralism, cultural understanding, partnership, and awareness of our interconnectedness and the need for unity, which permeates the Berlin speech.

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