



A Theme for President Obama's Speech in Cairo: Reach for the Stars by L.R. Vasey

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President Obama has an opportunity to launch a major diplomatic initiative when he speaks in Cairo this week: his goal should be to convince allies and adversaries alike that America is ready to take the lead in creating a more positive and mutually rewarding political and economic relationship between the U.S. and the Islamic world (including but not limited to the greater Middle East), while simultaneously seeking cooperation so that together we can help curb nuclear proliferation and terrorism.

President Obama should be prepared to launch a 21st Century version of my generation's Marshall Plan. But this objective should only be pursued if the widespread ideological support for terrorism all too often found in much of the Muslim world can be transformed into condemnation of these decidedly un-Islamic practices.

President Obama should take a cue from former Indonesian President and distinguished Muslim leader Abdurrahmann Wahid. He should be forthright and challenge political and religious leaders in the Middle East and Southeast Asia to launch a *concerted effort that unequivocally banishes the fanatical ideology of hatred that underlies the fundamentalist terrorism that now threatens the very foundations of modern civilization, and agree on a compelling alternate vision of Islam as a true religion of peace.*

Until then, the extreme and perverse interpretation being put forth by Islamic extremist fanatics will continue to fuel their ultimate goal of establishing world-wide rule of their brand of authoritarian Islam, slaughtering all "infidels" who stand in the way as well as intimidating and subduing mainstream Muslims who do not share their extremist views. The vast majority of Muslims, as is continually demonstrated in countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, are not part of the terrorism but all too often their leaders, unlike Wahid and former Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, do not stand up against it, thus joining in the complicity of silence.

Mr. Wahid has described the situation as a "crisis of misunderstanding of Islam by Muslims themselves (which) is compounded by the failure of governments, people of other faiths and the majority of well-intentioned Muslims to resist, isolate, and discredit this dangerous ideology.....*Muslims themselves can and must propagate an understanding of the 'right' Islam and discredit extremist ideology.*"

Implicit in his condemnation are such barbaric practices as the indoctrination and training of suicide murderers, funding of terrorist organizations, and export of hatred of America and the West via a network of Islamic schools worldwide that propagate Islamic extremism.

President Obama should make clear in his Cairo address that only when Muslims themselves turn against such extremist ideology – and initiate actions to put their civilization on a path to restoring the old glory of the Muslim world as a multicultural zone of tolerance, intellectual, and scientific achievement – will it be feasible to create an enduring, productive new era in relations between Islam and the West.

But that will take time – and we cannot simply wait for it to develop. The United States can work jointly and in parallel now, to help form a coalition of countries, from Europe, the Middle East and Asia, to address and develop feasible solutions to such volatile issues as Palestine, Iran, nuclear proliferation (e.g., Syria) and terrorism, and in addition, to forging a framework for a new era of economic and trade relations.

This is an extremely ambitious and complex undertaking, comparable to the post-World War II era when American leaders reacted with a burst of creativity to resolve crises. Working across party lines, they created alliances such as NATO, launched the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine to rebuild war-torn regions, and established the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to help rebuild economies.

We of "The Greatest Generation" remain proud of our country and are confident that the world's only diplomatic and military superpower, with strong and decisive leadership, still has the inner strength – and credibility – to achieve this noble cause. We challenge President Obama to lead this effort on America's behalf as long as others are equally willing to unclench their fists and accept the extended hand of friendship being offered by the United States.