

America and muslims



Undoubtedly, the relationship between America and the Islam world has been on the wane. This continues to worsen with claims that anti terror agents are spreading a stereotype that targets Muslims especially of Arab origin. The relationship that America has with the Middle Eastern countries has changed rapidly and is now characterized by mutual acrimony and suspicion.

With the coming in of the newly elected president, Barack Obama and with a promise of revamping Americas foreign policy is being viewed with a glimmer of hope and renewed ties with the Muslim world, indeed this is the message communicated to the world by the recent visit to Turkey. With the war on terror still on, a significant proportion of Americans believe that extending an olive branch towards the Muslim countries is the wrong approach, instead, they belief that he should carry on with Bush policies and eliminateterrorismthrough force.

However, this paper maintains that to change the prevalent perception that the that the world has with the United States and also to erase suspicions over the blanket condemnation with Islam, America needs to re-initiate foreign ties and extend an olive branch to the Muslim world. The hostility characterizing the relationship between America and Muslim can be traced to the events of the September 11, 2001 attack. It is important to recognize that the 2001 terrorist attack was a big blow to the United States and hit at the core of its emotions and continues to evoke anger to date.

With this being the worst atrocity ever meted out on Americans in their own soil, it was bound to evoke all manner of responses both from the public and the ruling elite. The fact that the attack was masterminded and executed by

the al Qaeda, a Muslim extremist group was possible to evoke anti Islam sentiments amongst the Americans. This ushered an era of suspicion and poor relations between Islam and America. This situation was ultimately compounded by the response and the policies of President Bush.

Bush responded with a decisive precision that has become a characteristic of America's response to perceived aggression from outside. His policies and approach to attack the core of terrorism was interpreted to mean that he was out to attack Muslims (Rabasa et al 43). It has to be pointed out that after the onset of the attack, many Muslim leaders came out publicly to condemn the attack, " many Muslim leaders abroad were as keen to distance themselves from the terrorism of September 11 as were Muslim leaders in the United States.

" (Crockatt 74) With the exception of Iraq, majority of Islam states also condemned the attack. In his congressional address, Bush reiterated his stand on terrorism maintaining that he did not share in the perception that Islam was fuelling terrorism. However, the situation on the ground and indeed at the international politics coupled with the war against terrorism was different, the fateful events of the 9/11 created tensions not only in America but internationally, " Muslim feel that even though they had nothing to do with those involved with terrorism, they are being targeted and profiled by government agencies.

" (Khan 57) Bush's policies and actions did nothing to change this but on the contrary reinforced it, his clarions call of you are either with the terrorists or against us meant there was no middle ground and was lumping Muslims together with the terrorists. His concentration on the Middle East as the base

to fight terrorism also was an indication that he believed the Middle East, the epicenter of Islam, was behind terrorism and this is the main perception held by many Americans today. Cenap Cakmak Zaman in his article titled: What does Obama's visit say about future Turkish-American relations?

, he has examined this relationship, looking at how the recent visit to turkey by Obama will change the perception in the Muslim world. Obama is faced with an uphill task of changing this perception and also rooting it out terrorism. His popularity and positive ratings world wide lies on his message of hope and change, the change we need clarion call may have been intended for domestic affairs in Washington but the position of the United States as a global leader means that it has a huge stake in global politics.

His change message hence has to be duplicated internationally and in the Middle East is where it should commence. As Cakmak maintains, " the damage done by George W. Bush to American foreign policy was extensive. Reliance on a political design similar to the Bush style would surely make the damage irreparable and US foreign policy unsustainable". The recent Obama's visit to Turkey can be said to be well thought out and indeed timely. The Obama's administration in its bid to woo Muslims into the mainstream should start with Turkey because of two reasons.

Geopolitically, Turkey lies in one of the most important location, bordering Iraq and also having its foot in Europe. Turkey is both crucial to the advancement of Obama's policies in the Middle East and also in NATO. Cakmak has appreciated this by maintaining that " Obama's administration appreciates how Turkey is indispensable in its Middle Eastern policies and actions. " Core logic behind establishing good ties with Turkey lies in the fact

that it is comprised of a majority Muslims. Although secular by nature, Turkey has a huge Muslim population.

Acceptance of America amongst the Turkish leadership, which has been vocal in its criticism of Bush's reign, will go along way in thawing the existing tension and impasse with the Muslim world (Journal of Turkish Weekly). Obamas current approach represents a radical shift from the Bush's administration which failed to recognize the strategic importance of Turkey. It is important to point out that although Turkey is crucial if easing tension with Muslims is to be achieved, it may not necessarily be an authority in the region.

Due to its secularism and westernization, Turkey is not fully regarded as an Islamic state, despite its huge Islamic population. However, the recent visit may work in Obama's favor and install Turkey as a regional leader. A prudent analysis of this visit indicates that it meant to provide a new thinking and goes a long way in reassuring Muslims world wide of the United States commitment towards re-establishing the much needed good relations with Muslims. It re-emphasizes the need for multilateral approach to global problems and might provide the needed impetus towards the fight against terrorism.

A continuation of Bush's policies will be counterproductive as it was the cause of the existing tension. For his administration to emerge credible, it must denounce unilateral approach that characterized Bush's administration. In this way, America will be seen as working with the Muslims but not against them. Works Cited Crockatt, Richard. After 9/11: cultural dimensions of American global power. Routledge, 2007, 74 Khan, Arshad. Islam, Muslims,

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