

## Walking the talk back to Arabia

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Barack Obama is off to see the Arab world, taking carefully polished apologies and regrets and an assortment of grovels, but probably all unavailing. The Muslims want deeds, not words.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is no Arab but he suggests that if Americans convert to Islam further apologies might not be necessary. Mr. Obama has given no hint that he wants to go that far. The president is mixing remembrances of wars old and new on this trip, first apologizing in Cairo to anyone who thinks America is at war with Islam, and then going on to Buchenwald to pay homage to the memory of those who died at the hands of the Nazis and finally to Omaha Beach to honor the boys of the summer of '44.

In homage to the spirit of the moment he shouldn't say anything in Cairo about his later stops, since our Muslim friends were ambivalent at best in that earlier war. The grand mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, spent most of the war years taking the waters in Berlin, trying to persuade der fuehrer to extend the final solution to the Middle East.

Mr. Obama is expected to reprise his earlier regrets and amends, but with new ruffles and flourishes on his famous teleprompter. He gave the first television interview of his presidency to Al Arabiya, sounding properly chastened by regrets for whatever America had done to offend Muslims. He sent a special greeting to Iranians on their new year, and the last time he went abroad he repeated the obvious, telling the Turkish National Assembly that America never had been at war with Islam and never would be. Mr. Obama's remarks echoed the assurance by George W. Bush, given while rescuers were still pulling bodies out of the smoking rubble of the World Trade Center, that Islam is "a religion of peace." It's scary to imagine what else Mr. Obama might say to make Muslims feel good.

"He will face a nation hardened in its negative view of the United States and its role in the region, and unconvinced that this or any other American president can or will change policy," says James J. Zogby, president of the Arab American Institute. He cites a poll by his brother, John Zogby, that 75 percent of the Egyptians think Mr. Obama isn't a very good president. But why would they? The Egyptians have been feeding for years on propaganda that children here wouldn't swallow. The Egyptians can't get enough of grim fairy tales.

The more the Cairo media peddles the tales, the more voracious the appetite. A decade ago Cairenes rioted over a rumor that Christians were spray-painting crosses in invisible ink on the dresses of young women. Egyptians were told that if you hold a bottle of Coca-Cola to a mirror the iconic Coke script would reveal the

threat, printed backwards, "No Muhammad, No Mecca." The grand mufti of Egypt finally issued an official opinion that the Coca-Cola icon was designed in Atlanta "in the state of Georgia" more than a century earlier in English, not Arabic. He could have added that soda pop originated in a sweeter time when few Americans had even heard of either Muhammad or Mecca.

Owners of Cairo taxicabs had to begin refitting their cabs when a rumor erupted that seat belts manufactured in Israel contained an embedded chemical to render Arab men sterile. James F.X. O'Gara, writing in the Weekly Standard, notes that not even the exploding Egyptian birth rate could calm the hysteria. Egypt has so far not counted its first case of swine flu - that's the swine flu we're not supposed to call swine flu - but the government nevertheless ordered the slaughter of 350,000 pigs. (Thus neither barbecue nor burgoo for the visiting president.)

The president's speech at Cairo University will be dissected throughout the Islamic world, carefully measured to see whether he "walks the walk and not just the talk," in the words of Marina Mahathir, a "community organizer" in Malaysia, where her father was once the prime minister. The president could actually do several things to make the Muslims like us. In addition to converting to Islam, the Americans could get out of Iraq and Afghanistan, ease sanctions on Iran, abandon Israel, and prevent the imposition of Western values - e.g., democracy, freedom of speech and worship - and knock off embarrassing Western demands that Muslims quit beating up women. A tall order, but not so tall for a messiah.

Or he could tell the Islamic world that respect, like friendship, is earned, not conferred, and civilizing man's base instincts is hard work. But even cave men can do it.

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