

Ambassador Anne E. Derse

Interview on President Obama's Cairo Speech

ANS Television Correspondent Ayaz Mirzayev

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ANS: Hello, Madame Ambassador.

Ambassador Derse: Hello.

ANS: My first question is about President Obama's remarks yesterday. If I am not mistaken, President Obama made the same remarks at his inauguration, and he stressed at that time that his purpose was to spread the message that Americans are not enemies of Islam. What do you think? Did President Obama manage to give that message?

Ambassador Derse: Well, you're right. President Obama came to office with a firm commitment to establish a new beginning with Muslims all over the world, and he did, indeed, mention that in his inaugural speech. He followed up with an interview to Al Arabia, his first interview, a television interview. He introduced a Novruz statement to the people and the leaders of Iran. And then, in his visit to Turkey, at his important speech there at the Parliament, he outlined his thinking. And the speech yesterday carried forward this intention on his part to establish a new beginning with the people of the Muslim world.

I would like to emphasize that President Obama made this speech in the context of his broader approach to foreign policy, which is one based on engagement, on listening, on working together with all of our international partners in the spirit of mutual respect and on the basis of mutual interests.

And with respect to U.S. engagement with Muslim communities around the world, President Obama indeed stated again, as we have stated in the past many times, that the United States is not at war with Islam; the United States and Islam are not enemies. We want to work together as partners in confronting the challenges of the 21st Century.

His speech addressed a number of areas where there have been tensions between the United States and peoples of Muslim countries in recent years, but he emphasized the fact that we need to be working together on areas where we share interests and not let our differences divide us. In that context, he addressed very straight-forwardly a number of themes that are very important in our relationship.

He made very clear that we understand that Islam is one of the world's great religions. It has made great contributions to global civilization over many centuries; that it's part of the process of promoting peace, and that violent extremists who have misused it do not represent Islam or Muslims.

He expressed his firm belief that with respect to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that these wars have perhaps led to perceptions that are incorrect. We think it's very important that both the United States understand the Muslim communities of the world correctly, and that they understand us correctly. And if we work together and listen and engage with each other on the basis of mutual respect and mutual interests, that we can make progress together in addressing the challenges of the 21st Century.

I'll be happy to talk about all of the themes in the speech in greater detail, but maybe I should let you guide the discussion with your questions.

ANS: The United States President admitted that it's impossible to change the United States relations with the entire Muslim world in one night. However, the new administration expressed a willingness to build relations with the Muslim world in a new level. Will the result be successful?

Ambassador Derse: President Obama I believe laid out some very promising directions to build stronger relations. He underscored that all the peoples of the world – American peoples, people living in Muslim countries, people living in every country – share common aspirations. We want to live in peace and security. We want our children to be educated. We want to enjoy freedoms. We want to enjoy education and health. And yes, it's correct. You can't turn around a relationship on the basis of one speech. But President Obama offered some specific programs that we hope to use in the future, working together with partners in Muslim communities that will strengthen our relations.

He announced our intention to significantly increase our educational exchanges, both to bring Americans to Muslim countries and Muslim students and professors to the United States. So we will dramatically expand our educational exchanges. We intend to expand our scholarships to bring students to the United States and send students overseas. We intend to establish a network for "e-learning" that will connect people in a virtual university around the world.

President Obama wants to work together to promote greater economic development. The United States hosts some of the best business schools in the world. We have great business experience with consultants and business people, and we intend to set up a business corps of volunteers who will contribute their expertise and their knowledge to help spur economic development.

President Obama also announced that we'll hold a summit for entrepreneurs sometime this year where we will bring together philanthropists, business people, social entrepreneurs from Muslim communities and the United States to spur greater economic development and innovation.

We want to share efforts to defeat major global health problems; for example, polio is one of the diseases that disproportionately affects Muslim communities. We have announced a major new initiative with the Organization of the Islamic Conference to work together to finally eradicate polio.

We want to share joint efforts to work on the issues of science and technology that can bring dramatic improvements in the lives of people in the future. So we have established a new scientific fund to promote development, innovation in science and technology that will have commercial potential. We are going to establish scientific centers of excellence in various parts of the United States and the Muslim world. And we're going to work together through science envoys who will bring some of the United States' most respected scientists to work collaboratively with their colleagues in Muslim communities to help develop new directions, new approaches in science and technology.

These are some of the concrete programs and directions that we intend to follow to build real cooperation on issues that confront all of our people in the 21st Century.

ANS: President Obama also mentioned in his remarks that Washington is going to step ahead in United States-Iran relations. Do you think that this step might influence the presidential elections in Iran?

Ambassador Derse: I think that only the Iranian people will influence the presidential elections in Iran. But it is important for people to understand our evolving policy with respect to Iran. We have experienced many years of tension with Iran. But here, too, President Obama has announced the United States' intention and interest in engaging in a new relationship on the basis of mutual respect and mutual interests, and engaging without preconditions.

At the same time he's made very clear that he believes that Iran's development of a nuclear weapon would be profoundly destabilizing to the region. It could result in an arms race that would have great consequences for everyone in the region, for the United States, for the world.

President Obama has said that he will work towards a world where no nations, no nations, have nuclear weapons and where all nations can avail themselves of peaceful nuclear power consistent with their obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Nations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty have rights to the use of civil nuclear power, but they also have responsibilities. In our view, Iran, like any other country, has the right under the Nuclear

Non-Proliferation Treaty to avail itself of peaceful nuclear power if it lives up to its responsibilities.

ANS: Ambassador, as we know, there are new White House recommendations to invite Iranian diplomats to Embassy events. How correct is this information?

Ambassador Derse: It's correct that as part of the Obama administration's policy of engagement with Iran, we have a policy that we can invite Iranian representatives to official representational functions.

ANS: If it's correct, please let us know if the United States Embassy is going to invite Iranian diplomats to the Independence Day celebrations.

Ambassador Derse: Consistent with our policy I will be inviting my counterpart to our Independence Day celebration.

ANS: Madame Ambassador, the United States also mediates the Palestine-Israel conflict. Bush administration activities in this area are known as the Annapolis process. What does the new administration plan to do to resolve this conflict?

Ambassador Derse: That's a very important question. Thank you for that question. I should underscore that this speech was not a vehicle for laying out our detailed approach on what to do about this very important issue. But the speech did lay out very important policy directions that we expect to see elaborated going forward.

President Obama is committed to working as hard as possible to find a solution to the issues between Israel, Palestine and the Arab world. For too long two peoples with legitimate aspirations have suffered the pain of dislocation, of violence when they should have the right to live in peace and security and enjoy all the rights we talked about before that are the aspirations of all people.

President Obama believes that the state of Israel and the state of Palestine have the right to exist. He called on both sides to recognize their obligations under the roadmap and to work hard together to find a way to solve this problem. He said that continued settlement activity in the occupied territories is not consistent with obligations. He stated that the continuing humanitarian crisis in Gaza does not serve the interests of Israel's security or peace, or America's interests. He called on the Palestinian people to cease incitement to violence. Violence is not an end. It's not a means to achieve the ends that they desire.

ANS: My last question, Madame Ambassador. There is also now the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which also prevents stability in the region. We witnessed during the Prague meeting

that there is some power which prevents a solution to this conflict in a peaceful way. What kind of problems does the United States face during these negotiations?

Ambassador Derse: The United States has been a committed partner in working to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and we will remain a committed partner. Here, too, President Obama has shown his personal commitment to working towards finding a solution.

As you know, President Obama has spoken with President Aliyev and underscored our commitment to working for rapid progress towards a solution. Secretary of State Clinton has also talked with the President and underscored her personal commitment to work to finding a solution.

So these are important demonstrations of the interest at the top levels of my government in finding a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We will continue to work as a partner with our Minsk Group colleagues and with the parties to find that solution.

So the speech was a beginning. President Obama's speech was a beginning, a continuation of the policy announced in his inaugural speech, and I think in the coming weeks and months you're going to see a lot of progress in the direction of resolving difficult issues, clearing up tensions. It won't be easy, but what President Obama has said is we're going to make every effort; we're going to do it in the spirit of mutual respect, and on the basis of mutual interests. He expressed his personal commitment and resolve in this direction.

Thank you very much.

Another question?

ANS: Thank you very much, Madame Ambassador. Only one question for news, *Xeberchi*.

Ambassador Derse: So you're asking me about the ending of my tenure as the U.S. Ambassador in Azerbaijan. It's correct; President Obama yesterday announced his intention to nominate me as the U.S. Ambassador to Lithuania. I'm delighted with this exciting new assignment and very honored that President Obama has announced his intention to nominate me. But it's just the first step in the process. In our system, after the announcement of the intention to nominate, the President must send the actual nomination to the U.S. Senate, and then the U.S. Senate will hold a hearing. They have the right to confirm or not to confirm me in that new position. I expect that process to start this summer, but I don't know exactly when, and I don't have a departure date yet.

But I would like to say that Azerbaijan was my first ambassadorial assignment, and it will always have a special place in my heart.

In my time here, I've had the privilege of really learning an enormous amount about Azerbaijan's history, about its wonderful culture, about its wonderful people, and about the challenges it faces. And I will leave with an enormous amount of respect for this country, its people, and with an enormous amount of optimism about its very bright future as a leader in this region.

Thank you.

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