

opinion

Teaching religious tolerance is one key to ending conflicts

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THE OBSERVER

The last weeks have seen a ghastly roll call of terror attacks in the obvious places: Syria, Libya, Iraq and Lebanon, as well as Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia and Pakistan.

Also suffering are places where we have only in recent years seen such violence: Nigeria, and in many parts of Central Africa, in Russia and across Central Asia, and in Burma, Thailand and the Philippines. We can either see all of these acts of killing as separate — produced by various political contexts — or we can start to see the clear common theme and start to produce a genuine global strategy to deal with it.

The fact is that, though of course there are individual grievances or reasons for the violence in each country, there is one thing self-evidently in common: the acts of terrorism are perpetrated by people motivated by an abuse of religion. It is a perversion of faith. But there is no doubt that those who commit the violence often do so by reference to their faith and the sectarian nature of the conflict is a sectarianism based on religion. There is no doubt either that this phenomenon is growing, not abating.

We have to be prepared to take the security measures necessary for our immediate protection. Since 9/11, the cost of those measures, and their burden, has been huge. However, security action alone, even military action, will not deal with the root cause. This extremism comes from a source. It is not innate. It is taught. It is taught sometimes in the formal education system; sometimes in the informal religious schools; sometimes in places of worship and it is promoted by a vast network of internet communications.

Technology, so much the harbinger of opportunity, can also be used by those who want to disseminate lessons of hate and division. Today's world is connected as never before. This has seen enormous advances. It means there is a kind of global conversation being conducted. This is exciting and often liberating. But it comes with the inevitable ability for those who want to get across a message that is extreme to do so. This has to be countered.

At present, our screens are dominated by the hideous slaughter in Syria. We have to hope that the peace negotiations succeed. But with more than 130,000 dead — and, on some accounts, the total is nearer 200,000 — millions displaced and the country in a state of disintegration, it is hard to see how there can be a lasting agreement for peace unless it is based on a clear recognition that the Syria arising from this has to be one in which all people are treated equally, regardless of which faith they practise or which part within a faith they belong to. That will never work while either a minority religious group rules the country whose majority has a different adherence, or where those fighting the regime have powerful elements that also want to rule on the basis of religious difference — and are prepared to use terrorism to get their way.



This is not just a matter of what any new constitution says. Democracy is not only a way of voting. It is a way of thinking. People have to feel equal, not just be regarded by the law as such. Such religious tolerance has to be taught and argued for. Those who oppose it have to be taken on and defeated not only by arms but by ideas.

All over the region, and including in Iraq, where exactly the same sectarianism threatens the right of the people to a democratic future, such a campaign has to be actively waged. It is one reason why the Middle East matters so much and why any attempt to disengage is so wrong and short-sighted. It is here in the center of Islam that so many of the issues around how religion and politics coexist peacefully will be determined.

But this issue of extremism is not limited to Islam. There are also many examples the world over where Muslims are the victims of religiously motivated violence from those of other religious faiths.

So the challenge is clear. And it is one that could define the nature of peace and conflict in the first half of the 21st century. The battles of this century are less likely to be the product of extreme political ideology — like those of the 20th century — but they could easily be fought around the questions of cultural or religious difference.

The answer is to promote views that are open-minded and tolerant towards those who are different, and to fight the formal, informal and internet propagation of closed-minded intolerance. In the 21st century, education is a security issue.

For that reason, when I left office, and in part based on my experience post-9/11 of how countries whose people were freed from dictatorship have then had democratic aspirations thwarted by religious extremism, I established a foundation whose aim is to promote greater knowledge and understanding between people of different faiths. This is not a call to faith — it is a call to respect those of all faiths and not to allow faith to divide us but instead to embody the true values of compassion and humanity

common to all faiths.

The foundation is now active in more than 20 countries, including some of those most affected by sectarianism, with a multimillion-pound budget, full-time and part-time staff, and expanding rapidly. We focus on practical programs. The schools program, accredited to the international GCSE and recognized by the international baccalaureate, uses video conferencing and online interaction to link classes of students from different countries across the world to learn about each other and to learn to live with each other.

There is a university program, which we are building into a minor degree course, that began at Yale but is now in more than 20 universities, including in China and Latin America, where students study faith and globalization — essentially the place of religion in modern society. And an action program, pioneered in Sierra Leone but now being extended, where we help deliver the anti-malaria campaign of the United Nations by using the faith infrastructure of the churches and the mosques.

Later this year, in collaboration with Harvard Divinity School, we will launch a new website that will provide up-to-date analysis of what is happening in the field of religion and conflict; in-depth analysis of religion and its impact on countries where this is a major challenge; and basic facts about the religious make-up and trends in every country worldwide.

Evidently, we can reach only parts of the world and be a small part of fighting a huge problem. But the purpose is to change the policy of governments: to start to treat this issue of religious extremism as an issue that is about religion as well as politics, to go to the roots of where a false view of religion is being promulgated, and to make it a major item on the agenda of world leaders to combine effectively to combat it. This is a struggle that is only just beginning.

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Japan and China's great African game

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A new scramble for Africa is unfolding. But it's no longer Western powers vying for land and the continent's wealth as they had until the outbreak of World War I. The power struggle now is among Asian nations, most notably China and Japan.

This time around, the West is content to stand on the sidelines as Asia's biggest powers duke it out to secure resources in the world's final economic frontier. Unlike in the centuries past, however, there is no coercion or bloodshed. Instead, the race is on for Japan and China to woo Africa's public opinion at large — not just the favors of investor and leadership class.

Japan's latest effort concluded recently with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to Africa in early January 2014. It was the first such visit by a Japanese premier in eight years, in contrast with the multiple marathon trips by Chinese presidents during the same period.

Of the countries Abe visited, Cote d'Ivoire is a center of commerce in its region and Mozambique is rich in natural gas and other assets. The Japanese prime minister also made sure he met with the Ivorian soccer team and Mozambique's women basketball league. In Ethiopia, Abe not only delivered a speech at the African Union's Addis Ababa headquarters, but he also made a point to meet with Ethiopian athletes, including marathon legend Abebe Bikila's son.

The official point of meeting African athletes was to promote Tokyo's upcoming 2020 Summer Olympic games. But it also served the promotion of Japanese sporting business interests, not least by distributing free Asics sneakers.

On the financial front, the visit brought announcements by the Japanese government to double the total amount of

low interest loans to the continent to \$2 billion over a five year period, having promised \$1 billion in 2012. Meanwhile, last summer, Tokyo promised Africa a total of \$32 billion in public and private funding. This amount included \$14 billion in official development assistance as well as \$6.5 billion to support infrastructure projects across the continent. Japan has also promised to train African experts on cutting-edge technology and engineering.

Clearly, securing resources in the longer-term is a priority for Japan, not least due to struggles to meet its energy needs after the shutdown of all 50 of its nuclear reactors since the March 2011 earthquake at Fukushima.

Amid growing geopolitical uncertainties, Japan also faces a challenge of meeting its other commodities needs. Indonesia's recent decision to ban exports of nickel and bauxite, for instance, has hit Japan's stainless steel producers particularly hard. The surge in resource nationalism is only expected to strengthen worldwide. That makes it all the more urgent for resource-poor nations like Japan to win over as many commodities-rich nations as possible.

In his approach to Africa, Abe seems to have hit all the right diplomatic notes since taking office just over a year ago. He managed to balance offers of financial aid, technology transfer and investments with winning over public opinion.

It was a sharp contrast in public relations efforts compared to his tone-deaf approach to dealing with neighboring China and South Korea. Those ties have only been aggravated further by the premier's decision to visit Yasukuni Shrine, which commemorates Class-A war criminals as well as Japanese soldiers who died in action, only days before his Africa trip.

While the Yasukuni visit was largely dismissed by the mainstream African press, senior Chinese government officials for Africa have been quick to attack Abe's

outreach and Japan's foreign policy ambitions at large.

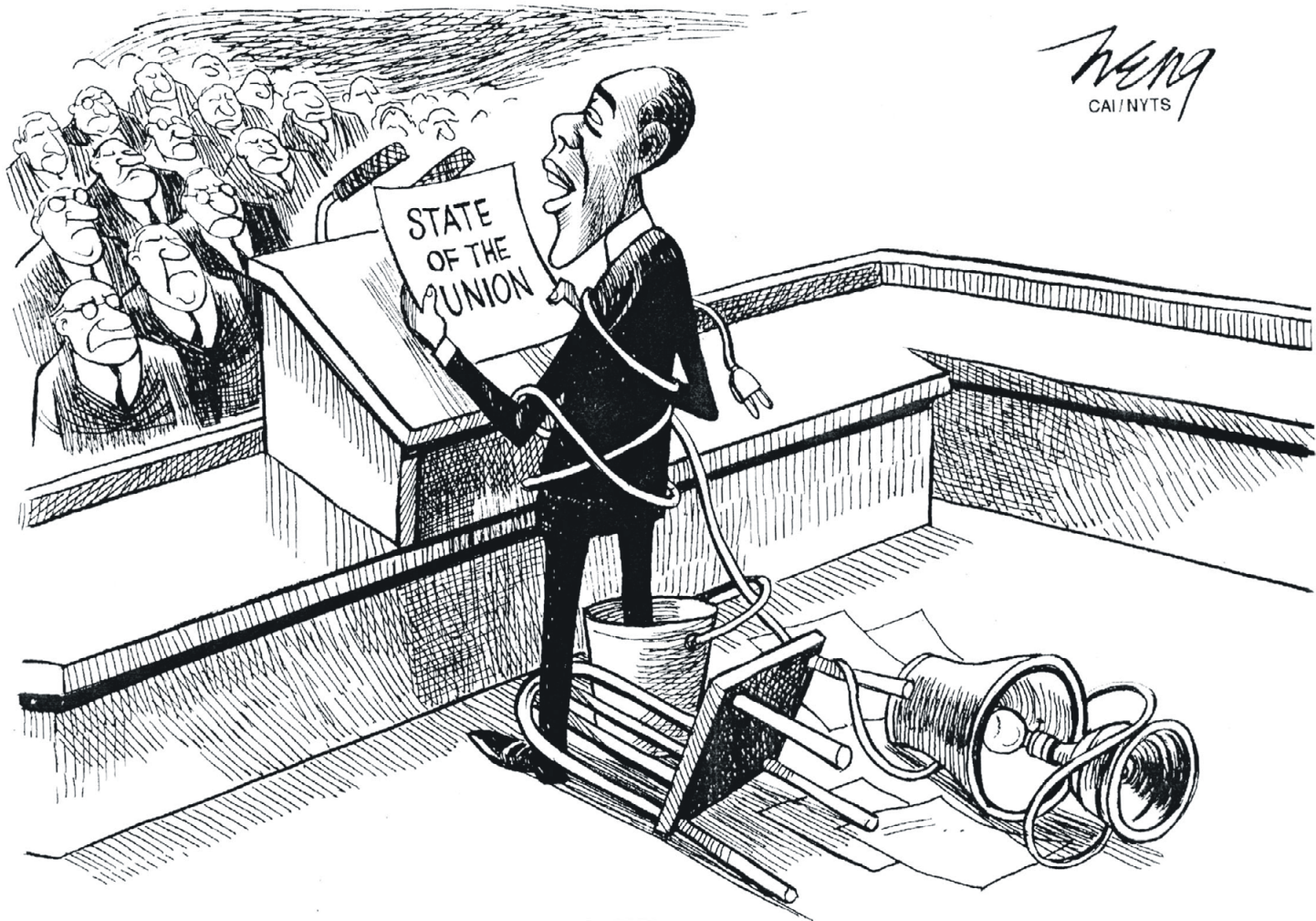
China's ambassador to the African Union, Xie Xiaoyan, publicly stated that Japan's prime minister is becoming "the biggest troublemaker in Asia." He added that Japan's aid efforts to the continent were part of Tokyo's "China containment policy." Yet China remains the single biggest player on aid to Africa. It has committed over \$75 billion to the continent since 2000, and Japan simply cannot match that figure, dollar for dollar.

Still, Beijing clearly has lessons to learn from Abe's public relations success. The Chinese have come under attack for not giving back to the local communities that they invest in and they do not offer enough jobs or train people in Africa, bringing many workers from China instead.

Meanwhile, international organizations have criticized Chinese state-owned companies for their labor practices in overseas mines. A Human Rights Watch report in 2011, for instance, attacked state-owned China nonferrous Metal Mining Group for violating labor laws and regulations "routinely." For both Japan and China, the stakes for Africa are real, unlike the disputes over territories in the East China Sea. The latter are more about a clash of nationalist identities rather than a race for resources.

For now, though, Japan appears to have the upper hand in Africa, at least diplomatically. The real challenge for Beijing will be whether it can match Tokyo's soft power approach to winning over African hearts and minds.

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What exactly are these Obama 'executive orders'?

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In the aftermath of President Barack Obama's State of the Union address, there is a lot of confusion about the phrase "executive actions." The president has an assortment of different tools, and it is important to distinguish among them.

"Executive orders," issued by the president personally, often involve large-scale, government-wide matters, and contain his own orders to the officials who work for him. For example, an executive order might require executive agencies to reassess and streamline existing regulations, to promote diversity in the federal workforce, or to improve customer service.

Executive orders are nothing new. In his first five years, Obama issued 167 executive orders — a lower rate than George W. Bush (291 over eight years), Bill Clinton (364 over eight years), George H.W. Bush (166 over four years), Ronald Reagan (381 over eight years), or for that matter Dwight Eisenhower (486 over eight years).

"Presidential memoranda," also issued by the president personally, often involve more technical matters and might be issued to one or few members of the executive branch. For example, a presidential memorandum might direct the Environmental Protection Agency to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from power plants, or might direct agencies to modernize the nation's electric transmission grid by improving the process for siting, permitting and reviewing transmission lines. The line between executive orders and presidential memoranda is not always crisp and clear,

but the former tend to involve more significant matters.

In the general category of "executive action," much of the most important work comes from "regulations," which typically have the force of law, and which may well bind the private sector (or, for that matter, state and local governments). Regulations are issued by agencies, not by the president personally, but they reflect his commitments and priorities.

For example, the Obama administration has issued a serious of regulations increasing the fuel economy of motor vehicles. The regulations were issued by the Department of Transportation and the Environmental Protection Agency, not by the president himself.

As of today, 112 regulatory actions are under review at the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, and summaries are publicly available. Eighteen of the pending rules come from the Department of Health and Human Services; 16 from the Department of Transportation; nine come from the Department of Energy; five come from the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Many of them would have a significant impact. For example, a rule from the Department of Health and Human Services would eliminate or reduce regulatory requirements that appear to impose unnecessary burdens on hospitals, doctors and nurses. A rule from the Food and Drug Administration would improve the current nutrition facts label. The Department of Energy is considering rules that would increase the energy efficiency of battery chargers, automatic commercial icemakers and commercial refrigeration equipment. The track record of energy efficiency rules

has been extremely good, producing benefits (including consumer savings) well in excess of costs.

Before they are finalized, significant regulations are subject to careful scrutiny within the executive branch, and also to a process of public comment. They must also comport with the law. For this reason, it is misleading — a kind of rhetorical trick — to suggest that they are "bypassing Congress." On the contrary, Congress has previously authorized them through legislation. Most of them are not subject to serious legal challenge.

Agencies also have the authority to issue general policy statements, or interpretive rules, that do not have the force of law but can have real effects, economic or otherwise. For example, an agency can issue a policy statement clarifying that it will not undertake enforcement action in certain domains. Or it can interpret a law, or a regulation, in a way that expands or contracts the reach of minimum wage and maximum hour requirements. Here as well, there are legal restrictions in what the executive branch can do, but significant steps are possible.

The important point is that the phrase "executive actions" includes an assortment of different tools. Both Republican and Democratic presidents have legitimately invoked all of them, especially when legislative paths are blocked.

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Three more bad omens on Iran nuclear talks

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The velocity of bad sign-spotting is increasing as we get closer to the main negotiations over Iran's nuclear program.

Bad Sign No. 1: I think it's important to note that Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has just stated that under no circumstances would Iran agree to destroy any of its centrifuges. I would also like to note that this unequivocal statement, if sincere, means that there is no possibility of a nuclear deal between Iran and the six powers set to resume negotiating with it next month.

In order to keep Iran perpetually 6 to 12 months away from developing a nuclear weapon — an unacceptable period in the mind of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, but a time-frame that U.S. President Barack Obama could conceivably accept — Iran would have to agree to dismantle 15,000 centrifuges; close an important uranium enrichment site; and accept 20 years of nuclear inspections, according to the Institute for Science and International Security, a well-respected (and centrist) think tank headed by the former United Nations weapons inspector David Albright.

Here is what Rouhani — who is described as a far more moderate a figure than the man who actually leads Iran, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei — said on CNN: "In the context of nuclear technology, particularly of research and development and peaceful nuclear technology, we will not accept any limitations. And in accordance with the parliament law, in the future, we're going to need 20,000 megawatts of nuclear-produced electricity, and we're determined to obtain the nuclear fuel for the nuclear installation at the hands of our Iranian scientists. And

we are going to follow on this path." At which point, his interviewer, Fareed Zakaria, asks: "So there would be no destruction of centrifuges, of existing centrifuges?" To which Rouhani responds: "Not under any circumstances. Not under any circumstances."

I'm not sure how Rouhani and his chief negotiator, the suave, superficially Westernized Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, back down from this maximalist position. And I'm not sure how Obama could possibly accept a deal that mothballs centrifuges while leaving them in place, rather than devising an agreement that guarantees their destruction. If the centrifuges are allowed to remain in Iran, but are disabled (or covered with bedsheets or wrapped in couch-plastic or locked in a very big room), it would possible for Iran to very quickly start spinning them again. First step: Kick out the inspectors. Second step: Break the locks. Third step: Enrich uranium to weapons-grade level in a short enough period that the West — the lumbering, ambivalent, disputatious West — has insufficient time to respond.

This would be the moment, of course, at which Obama would have to carry out his promise to use whatever means necessary to stop Iran from going nuclear, and this is not a position Obama wants to create for himself — which is why leaving the centrifuges in place would not be a wise move for him.

Bad Sign No. 2: Zarif, the moderate's moderate, might not be so moderate at all. Writing in the New Republic, Ali Alfoneh and Reuel Marc Gerecht plumb Zarif's new memoir, "Mr. Ambassador: A Conversation with Mohammad-Javad Zarif, Iran's Former Ambassador to the United Nations," and find distressing signs of ideological fervor: "His discussion of the basic nature of the Islamic Republic and the West exposes Zarif's ideological commitment and the

regime's revolutionary constancy."

They quote him: "We have a fundamental problem with the West and especially with America," Zarif declares. "This is because we are claimants of a mission, which has a global dimension. It has nothing to do with the level of our strength, and is related to the source of our raison d'être. How come Malaysia [an overwhelmingly Muslim country] doesn't have similar problems? Because Malaysia is not trying to change the international order. It may seek independence and strength, but its definition of strength is the advancement of its national welfare."

Alfoneh and Gerecht continue, "While Zarif considers national welfare one of the goals of the Islamic Republic, he stresses that 'we have also defined a global vocation, both in the Constitution and in the ultimate objectives of the Islamic revolution.' He adds: 'I believe that we do not exist without our revolutionary goals.'" In other words, U.S. negotiators facing Zarif might be facing someone who is more rigidly ideological than they are prepared to acknowledge.

Bad Sign No. 3: A new study by the Pentagon's Defense Science Board raises questions about the U.S. ability to detect nuclear activity in countries that don't want the U.S. to know about their nuclear activities. Iran for many years maintained secret nuclear facilities and could conceivably be maintaining undeclared nuclear facilities today. This study indirectly suggests that U.S. intelligence would have difficulty making sure Iran adheres to a nuclear accord.

Of course, Bad Sign No. 1 seems to mean that there will never be a nuclear accord to monitor in the first place.

Jeffrey Goldberg writes about the Middle East, U.S. foreign policy and national affairs for Bloomberg View.