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HEADLINE: MUSLIMS HAIL HOPE - NOW WANT ACTIONS TO JOIN WORDS

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BODY:

Muslims around the world welcomed President Obama's call for a "new beginning" yesterday, but said he must back up his historic speech with deeds.

Shahinda al-Bahgouri, a 20-year-old student at Cairo University, said she was impressed because Obama "was seriously humble. Humility is important for us."

Hani Ameer, an Iraqi immigrant in London, said Obama struck the right note.

"I grew up as a Muslim, and some religious leaders told us to hate other people," he said.

"So he was speaking directly at me, telling us to stop hating Israelis and Jews. He is the most powerful man in the world, and millions of people around the Middle East will see hope in what he said."

Even Hamas found something good to say.

"There is a change between the language of President Obama and previous speeches made by George Bush," said Fawzi Barhoum, a spokesman for the terrorist group in the Gaza Strip.

But he complained that the president "did not include a mechanism that can translate his wishes and views into actions."

Muslims also were impressed by the president's verbal gestures, such as opening his speech with the traditional Arabic greeting "salaam aleikum" and quoting the Koran.

Zahid Husain Gardezi, a 50-year-old landowner in the Pakistani city of Multan, said, "It is the first time I have ever heard such affectionate words from an American for Muslims."

Yasmine Bennami, a 27-year-old Malaysian computer engineer, struck a similar note.

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"It's the first time ever that I see an American president quoting verses from the Koran," she said.

That also impressed Rabah al-Mutawa, a resident of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

"I challenge any Arab leader to go to the US or the West and quote the Bible like Obama quoted the Koran," she said.

Mohammed Zakarneh, a 33-year-old former West Bank militant, said Obama's speech "planted seeds of hope in our hearts, as Arabs and Muslims."

Iranian hard-liners and moderates were divided.

Mohammad Ali Abtahi, an Iranian cleric who was vice president under reformist President Mohammad Khatami, called the speech "compensation to hostile environment which was created during President Bush."

"This can be an initial step for removing misconceptions between world of Islam and the West," he said.

But even before the speech, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ridiculed it as "slogans" that would not change how Muslims "hate America from the bottom of their heart."

Although Obama broke no new ground on major policy issues, many Muslims appeared impressed by hearing for the first time that he would pull troops out of Iraq by 2012, and call for a halt in Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

In a West Bank coffee shop, Basel Abul Abed said it was an important first step, but not the final step.

"His real problem will be with Israel, not with Arabs and not with Muslims," he said. "We are waiting for Mr. Obama's real work. Next time we see him, we want him to congratulate us for our Palestinian state."

Israel issued a cautious statement, expressing hope that the speech would lead "to a new era of reconciliation between the Arab and Muslim world and Israel."

Many American Muslims made sure to hear the speech live, even though it was broadcast starting at 6:10 a.m. (EDT).

"I think he won hearts and minds in the Muslim world today," said Salam al-Marayati, the executive director of the Muslim Public Affairs Council in Los Angeles, who stayed up until 3 a.m. to watch the speech.

Kemal Bozkurt, of Lawrence, Mass., who publishes a directory of Muslim businesses in New England, said, "I liked how he mentioned Muslims in America and that he mentioned his father was a Muslim.

"Now it's time for him to take action."

With Post Wire Services

Grading Obama

THOMAS W. LIPPMAN

Adjunct senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and the author of "Understanding Islam."

BEST PART: "He reiterated the principles that he and Americans believe in - freedom of the individual, settling differences by nonviolent means, and telling people to deal with the realities of history."

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WORST PART: "He said less than he could and should have about the status of women. He shortchanged that a little bit."

SUBSTANCE: "There were some things that people would have liked him to say, like criticizing [certain] countries, regimes or leaders, but this was not the place."

DELIVERY: "He spoke with dignity and firmness, yielding no ground on basic American principals . . . The tone was respectful but not deferential."

OVERALL GRADE: A-

CHRISTOPHER PREBLE

Director of foreign-policy studies at the Cato Institute and author of "The Power Problem: How American Military Dominance Makes Us Less Safe, Less Prosperous and Less Free."

BEST PART: "I like the fact that he connected today's policies with American traditions . . . We should, and do, lead by example."

WORST PART: "At times, it sounded like a State of the Union Address. It's almost like writing by committee. You're writing for different interest groups."

SUBSTANCE: "It was as substantive as these speeches tend to be, which is not very. But it's not the place to announce a dramatic change in policy."

DELIVERY: "He gave a good speech. I expected him to have an 'A' delivery, and he did."

OVERAL GRADE: B+

AJAMES PHILLIPS

Senior fellow for Middle Eastern affairs at the Heritage Foundation.

BEST PART: "It was good to stress tolerance, because Islamist extremists often show intolerance toward non-Muslims, as well as Muslims who disagree with them."

WORST PART: "He made a mistake by adapting the Arab view on the Arab-Israeli conflict by talking about occupation and humiliation - those are loaded words - without referencing the Arab military attacks and terrorism that created those conditions."

SUBSTANCE: "It sounded as if President Obama is running for president of the world. It had a lot of generalities and an emphasis on symbols and style."

DELIVERY: "I thought he gave a good speech in terms of style, but on substance, I disagree with it, especially the points he made on the Arab-Israeli conflict."

OVERALL GRADE: C-

GRAPHIC: -THOMAS W. LIPPMAN; CHRISTOPHER PREBLE; AJAMES PHILLIPS. -PULL UP A CHAIR: A Palestinian barber in Jerusalem's Old City has his TV tuned to President Obama's speech yesterday. [Sebastian Scheiner/AP] -THOMAS W. LIPPMAN; CHRISTOPHER PREBLE; AJAMES PHILLIPS.

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