

## AJC Adviser Hails Obama Speech

Tom Roberts | Jun. 4, 2009 NCR Today

I spoke today with Rabbi James Rudin, senior interreligious adviser for the American Jewish Committee. He called the Obama speech "brilliant" and said the speech contained "some very important things that Muslims and/or Arabs need to hear and sometimes don't want to hear."

Obama's emphasis on America's commitment to the survival and safety of Israel "needed to be said and said clearly," Rudin said, "Because the President of Iran has gone on and on about wiping Israel off the map and denying the Holocaust."

Rudin, also a columnist for Religion News Service, said the speech contained valuable history, including Obama's acknowledgment of the U.S. overthrow of the government in Iran, which led to the Shah and abuses of human rights. He said he thought it valuable that Obama detailed for the world his own life experience, including his father's connection to Islam and the fact that Obama lived in a Muslim culture as a child.

Obama's emphasis on religion and the need for interreligious cooperation was significant, said Rudin, because so often religion is dismissed in international relations as irrelevant.

Rudin was especially encouraged, he said, by the president's call for a cessation of violence, especially against innocents, a call that Rudin sees aimed directly at Islamic extremists. He also applauded the president's attention to women's rights.

Regarding Israel, Rudin said that while Obama acknowledged that the living situation of Palestinians is intolerable, he also denounced "continued settlements." Rudin said he may be parsing Obama's words, but he detected in that point that Obama "did not call for abandonment of settlements."

The test of the effect of the speech, he said, will be months down the road. "The very fact that Barack Hussein Obama was standing there as president of the United States was very threatening to Islamic extremists. We'll see now how he'll use his capital" to devise policy, said Rudin.

"He's going to have to face, as have past presidents, that there are Muslims who simply can not and will not recognize Israel as a Jewish state." The question, said Rudin, is what he'll do when he confronts that fact.

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