



THE RISE OF MUSLIM ANTI-AMERICANISM

Nakoula Basseley, the alleged maker of the trailer "Innocence of Muslims," set off deadly protests across the Muslim world. It is unreasonable to have expected the Muslims not to rise up when the trailer had depicted Prophet Mohammed a buffoon, a womaniser, and a child molester—pretty unseemly stuff and amateurish, too.

I am not the one to argue that religion should occupy a privileged position in rational discourse or that religious beliefs should not be subject to criticism. Every religion has a metaphysic behind it—a set of assumptions and proclamations with regard to matters pertaining to the origin of the universe, the workings of nature, and to man's place in all these. Such issues belong to the province of science and therefore when theologians step in and make pronouncements with regard to them they must necessarily be prepared to face a critical reception.

On the other hand, Nakoula was indulging in plain and crude insult and unjustified provocation. Why didn't the Muslims go for Nakoula and impose a fatwa on the latter? This is an interesting question.

Muslim protesters went for the Americans and the Western world. Sri Lankan controversial academic Nalin Silva in a piece published in The Island also joined the protestor fraternity and went a step further suggesting a Western-Christian conspiracy. Like the archetypal Sri Lankan patriot, Nalin sees conspiracies everywhere.

The hardfacts that come out are that the offending trailer had nothing to do with the US government or with any Western Christian lobby. The creator of the movie trailer is an Egyptian belonging to a minority brand of Egyptian Christians called the Copts. President Obama, Hillary Clinton and many Western leaders publicly condemned the act without reservation. It had been the plain cruelty of just one psychopath who needed attention. Nakoula got more than his share of deserved attention and his You Tube production became a blockbuster. If he follows up with the film, as promised, there is likely to be a gate-crash—at least out of curiosity. Or will it be World War III? As I write, the newspapers report that Nakoula has been arrested for violating a probation order by doing what he did. It seems this man had been convicted of Bank fraud and was serving a probation period. Nakoula was charged with eight probation violations, including lying to law-enforcement officers when they initially detained him for questioning, and using various aliases, which an assistant US attorney, Robert Dugdale, said was "part of a lengthy pattern of deception". That reveals a lot.

The way to comprehend the Muslim protests is that the latter had been really a political

manifestation of a deep and collective anti-American sentiment in the guise of religion. The history of anti-American sentiment has evolved over the years and taken many shapes. It is currently in its Muslim phase. The protest over the Nakoula trailer is yet another episode of this phase.

Anti-Americanism has been around long before this Muslim phase. It may be said to have begun during the early days of the Monroe Doctrine when the US declared that they were virtually having protective or Big Brother rights over the Latin American continent. US barred European intervention in Latin America. Roosevelt strengthened the Monroe Doctrine. This followed the early period of American expansionism when the country, now getting richer by the day, annexed Alaska and the surrounding territories.

With the rise of former Soviet Russia and the spread of communism America was represented by the communists as the personification of evil. America was declared an arch enemy of the liberating forces of socialism. The socialist camp sponsored anti-Americanism of all kinds among followers and fellow travellers. O'Connor argues that, "communism represented the starker version of anti-Americanism – a coherent worldview that challenged the free market, private property, limited government, and individualism." In turn America became paranoid about communists. Senator McCarthy's infamous witch hunts were allegorized by Arthur Miller in his immortal play *The Crucible*. The ensuing Cold War saw each side spying on the other.

The response to anti-communism lingered with the Americans who even long after the Cold War that ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall, kept on backing corrupt dictators in Third World countries so long at the latter agreed to be their lackeys. Both Saddam Hussein and Gaddafi had been originally American protégés. This unethical conduct left a bad taste with many non-committed nations who although less vociferous because of benefits from the US did not look upon the US with much enthusiasm. The Soviet era anti-Americanism is still kept burning by neo-socialists who fight hard to revive a dead ideology.

The Muslim version of Anti-Americanism took a more complicated turn. It emerged when America had virtually sponsored the state of Israel. It worsened when America and the West looked away at the Israeli occupation of Palestine. There is, however, another thread in the Muslim version of anti-Americanism. This may be called cultural anti-Americanism: The rise of Islamic fundamentalists saw in America's global reach and enormous power a palpable threat to the security of the Islamic way of life. The

the shapely thighs, sleek legs – and she shows all this and does not hide it." He was particularly disturbed by jazz which he called the American's preferred music, and which "was created by Negroes to satisfy their love of noise and to whet their sexual desires ..."

Qutb's ideas are said to have influenced Osama Bin Laden founder of the Jihadist organization Al-Qaeda. In conjunction with several other Islamic militant leaders, in 1996 Bin Laden issued two fatwa that Muslims should kill military personnel from the United States until they withdraw military forces from Islamic countries and withdraw support for Israel. Bin Laden was put on a criminal file by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

The US assassination of Bin Laden and its crushing of the Al-Qaeda movement were not understood by many Muslim leaders as a natural reaction by the US to a serious national threat. On the other hand, this led to a new spiral of anti-Americanism as Bin Laden was perceived as a martyr and a symbol of Muslim power. The subsequent invasive drone attacks on Pakistan and



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Afghanistan developed a similar reaction among Muslim countries.

Muslim anti-Americanism is now at its peak and the slightest provocation is enough to spur violent protests.

Political scientist Josef Joffe suggests five classic aspects of the phenomenon of anti-Americanism: "reducing Americans to stereotypes, believing the United States to have an irremediably evil nature, ascribing to the U.S. establishment a vast conspiratorial power aimed at utterly dominating the globe, holding the United States responsible for all the evils in the world, and seeking to limit the influence of the United States by destroying it or by cutting oneself and one's society off from its polluting products and practices." Ayatollah Khomeini declared America as the 'Great Satan.'

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