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The Islamophobia Industry
How the Right Manufactures Fear of Muslims

Nathan Lean

Pluto Press, September 2012
6 x 9 inches, 208 pages,

The Islamophobia Industry reflects the rising tide of anti-Muslim feeling sweeping through the United States and Europe.
Lean takes us inside the minds of the manufacturers of Islamophobia – a highly-organized enterprise of conservative bloggers, right-wing talk show hosts, evangelical religious leaders, and politicians, united in their quest to exhume the ghosts of September 11th and convince their compatriots that Islam is the enemy. Lean uncovers their scare tactics, reveals their motives, and exposes the ideologies that drive their propaganda machine.

Situating Islamophobia within a long history of national and international phobias, *The Islamophobia Industry* unravels the narrative of fear that has long dominated discussions about Muslims and Islam.

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outing

"Nathan Lean’s meticulous study of the Islamophobia industry is a convincing demonstration of the threat this form of extremism poses to a harmonious pluralistic society and democratic values. Rationalizing hatred of Muslims, well-funded ideologues have also negatively impacted civic discourse and pushed conservative politics into the orbit of right-wing extremism. Lean’s book is an important resource for all people who wish to understand the forces that are manipulating our political process and discourse." - Ingrid Mattson, Chair in Islamic Studies, Huron University College

“This concise, accessible and illuminating book meets one of the most urgent needs of our time. Nathan Lean has provided us with a compelling counter-narrative that reveals the vested interests and highly-organized networks of those who preach the virulent Islamophobia that is not only endangering world peace but is also corroding the tolerance and egalitarian ethos that should characterize Western society. This book should be required reading.” - Karen Armstrong, author of *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*

"Nathan Lean has written a book of immense importance for our times. By lifting the veil on the multi-million-dollar Islamophobia Industry, Lean shines a light on the network of business, political, and religious organizations and individuals who employ rank bigotry to promote their interests. A must-read." - Reza Aslan, author of *No god But God.*

"In this provocative and engaging book, Nathan Lean meticulously untangles the dense web of fear merchants who have made Muslim-bashing a cottage industry. He reveals the connections between them and the motives that animate their machine of propaganda. Lean’s is a battle against Islamophobia, one that he wages with a seamless and compelling narrative." - Juan Cole, author of *Engaging the Muslim World.*

"Nathan Lean skillfully narrates an alternative history of the contemporary relationship between the Muslim world and the West, reminding his readers of the effects of Islamophobia in a moving and powerful way. This book is absolutely indispensable for building the more positive and shared future that still alludes us a decade into the War on Terror. Any journalist, pundit, policy-maker or intelligence analyst who doesn’t read *The Islamophobia Industry* and take its message to heart is committing professional malpractice. Any citizen concerned about the future of this country and the world at large owes it to themselves to read this book lest the processes Lean describes reach a tipping point and poison relations between the West and the Muslim world for generations to come." - Mark LeVine, author of *Heavy Metal Islam*

"Nathan Lean has written an eye-opener — the most comprehensive book to date on a new
and dangerous cycle of minority persecution in American society. Lean's book exposes the key players, funders and enablers of Islamophobia in America and the destructive effect of their politics on our national fabric. Worth every minute of reading." - Nihad Awad, National Executive Director, Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR)

"The spike in anti-Muslim sentiment didn't fall from the sky or rise from the ground - it was manufactured by a shadowy network of bloggers, funders, pundits, preachers and politicians. In a tightly-written, fast-paced narrative that feels like a thriller backed by the research of a doctoral thesis, Nathan Lean shows us just how deep the rabbit hole goes. Essential reading for anyone who wants a window into the origins of contemporary Islamophobia." - Eboo Patel, author of Acts of Faith and Sacred Ground

"In the months after 9/11, Americans took pride in defending Muslim neighbors in their own communities. Political leaders boasted about liberating Muslims overseas. So why are the politics of fear more intense a decade after the murders at the twin towers? Lean pins the blame on an Islamophobia industry in a lucid and detailed examination of the dark side of our politics." – Richard Wolffe, MSNBC political analyst and author of Renegade: The Making of a President

"Islamophobia is not only about ignorance and fear. Some people purposefully nurture it and use it as a political strategy. Nathan Lean’s The Islamophobia Industry shows what is happening behind the scenes. It is an essential book for anyone who wants to understand the rationale and objectives behind those who foster this new racism against Muslims." – Tariq Ramadan, Professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies at Oxford University and author of The Quest for Meaning

"So many of America's mistakes and bad acts over the past decade are due to Islamophobia, and Nathan Lean’s new book traces the phenomenon's genesis and its culprits. Those who have been spawning this all-too-familiar demonization campaign have been hiding in the dark for too long. This book is so valuable because it drags them out into the light and thus performs a true service for the nation." – Glenn Greenwald, columnist for Salon and author of Liberty and Justice For Some

"Nathan Lean’s The Islamophobia Industry could not be more timely or critical. This is an extraordinarily important and groundbreaking study. It exposes the multi-million-dollar cottage industry of fear mongers and the network of funders and organizations that support and perpetuate bigotry, xenophobia, racism, and produce a climate of fear that sustains a threatening social cancer." – John L. Esposito (from the foreword)

about the Author(s)

Nathan Lean

Nathan Lean is an author and scholar of Middle East studies. He has written extensively about Islam, American foreign policy, national politics, and global affairs. He is co-author of Iran, Israel, and the United States: Regime Security vs. Political Legitimacy and is a contributing writer at PolicyMic. He is editor-in-chief of Aslan Media and currently resides in Washington, D.C.
A Closer Look At Islamophobia In The U.S.
Nathan Lean interviews with Sacha Pfeiffer on WBUR Here & Now; Now; aired on Wednesday, September 12, 2012.
Duration: 7:29

Aslan Media Book Chat with Nathan Lean
Nathan Lean, Aslan Media Editor-in-Chief, discusses his new book, "The Islamophobia Industry."
Watch Video (Duration: 15:04)

ISLAMOPHOBIA AND EMPIRE
Traces Western dislike of Islam before and after 9-11. Recent prejudices have deep roots in the history of imperialism.

Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire
• Globalization & Imperialism

In response to the events of 9/11, the Bush administration launched a “war on terror” ushering in an era of anti-Muslim racism, or Islamophobia. However, 9/11 did not create Islamophobia, an ideology which has become the handmaiden of imperialism. This book examines the historic relationship between Islamophobia and the agenda of empire-building.

Click to Listen to Deepa Kumar Speak on the Book

About the author

Deepa Kumar is an Associate Professor of Media Studies and Middle East Studies at Rutgers University. She is the author of Outside the Box: Corporate Media, Globalization and the UPS Strike. She has offered her analysis on Islamophobia to numerous outlets around the world including the BBC, USA Today, Philadelphia Inquirer, Mexico’s Proseco, China International radio, and Gulf News from Dubai.

Reviews
This is a timely and crucial book. From historical roots to ideological causes, Islamophobia is studied in a holistic, profound and serious way. The reader will understand why we need to stop being both naive and blind. There will be no peaceful and just future in our democratic societies if we do not fight this new type of dangerous racism-- Tariq Ramadan, Professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Oxford University

"Deepa Kumar's book "Islamophobia" is powerful, necessary and a true work of solidarity." -- Ali Abunimah

Deepa Kumar's *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* could not be more timely. In this deftly argued book, Kumar unearths a genealogy of colonial construction that goes back to the earliest contacts between Muslims and Europeans. But the real power of her argument is when she grabs the politics of ideological domination by the throat and, with an astonishing moral and intellectual force, sets the record straight as to who and what the players are in turning a pathological fear of Muslims into a cornerstone of imperial hegemony. This is a must read on both sides of the Atlantic, where from mass murderers in Europe to military professors at the US military academies are in the business of manufacturing fictive enemies out of their fanciful delusions. Deepa Kumar has performed a vital public service-- Hamid Dabashi, Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature, Columbia University

This important book sets out to debunk Orientalist myths in particular that historical encounters between Islam and the West can be understood through a clash of civilisations framework. The author explores the specific historical and political contexts of this relationship from the Crusades to Obama providing a nuanced and extensive analysis. Kumar presents these arguments with a force and passion that is supported by a wealth of evidence. A must for scholars of Islam, social and political science and international relations-- Elizabeth Poole, author of *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims*

In this remarkable primer Deepa Kumar expertly shows how racism is central to contemporary US imperial politics in ways similar to previous imperial wars, including the one that constituted the United States over the dead bodies of indigenous "redskins." An antiracist and antiwar activist, as well as a model scholar-teacher, Kumar has written a comprehensive and most readable guide to exposing and opposing the hatred of Islam-- Gilbert Achcar, Professor of Development Studies & International Relations, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London

Against the historical backdrop of the rise of pax Americana in a unipolar world, Deepa Kumar's *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* stands out as a powerful
and comprehensive overview of Islamophobia, forcefully underscoring its role as a keystone to maintaining US political and economic power abroad while simultaneously managing American politics and critical dissent at home. Prof. Kumar meticulously maps historical developments within the formation of American Islamophobia and names the players, institutions and strategies central to the phenomenon, insightfully marking its permutations within Right wing civilizational discourses and the soft power and humanitarian discourses of American liberals--Stephen Sheehi, author of Islamophobia: The Ideological Campaign against Muslims.

Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire will be indispensable to anyone wanting to understand one of the most persistent forms of racism in the US and Europe. Kumar demonstrates that Islamophobic myths did not arise spontaneously after the end of the Cold War but are rooted in centuries of conquest and colonialism, from the Crusades to the 'War on Terror'. Arguing with precision and clarity, she shows how these myths have been systematically circulated by liberals as much as conservatives, and usefully lays bare the complex ways in which the US foreign policy establishment has, in different contexts, instrumentalized Islamic political movements and exploited anti-Muslim racism. Kumar's text will be a crucial corrective to those who fail to see that the origins of the 'Islam problem' lie in empire not sharia-- Arun Kundnani, author of The End of Tolerance : Racism in 21st Century

ISLAMOPHOBIA:
The Ideological Campaign Against Muslims
by
Stephen Sheehi
PREFACE BY
MUMIA ABU JAMAL
FOREWORD BY
WARD CHURCHILL
Stephen Sheehi is Associate Professor of Arabic and Arab Culture and Director of the Arabic Program at the University of South Carolina. He teaches intellectual, literary, cultural, and artistic heritage of Arabo-Islamic world. His work interrogates various modalities of self, society, art and political economy with Arab modernity.

He is the author of *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity*, which examines the foundational writing of intellectuals of the 19th century Arab Renaissance or al-nahdah al-`arabiyah. The book discusses how Arab intellectuals offered a powerful cultural self-criticism along side their critiques and discussions of modernity, capitalism and European imperialism. He has also published in journals such as *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, *The British Journal of Middle East Studies*, *Discourse, Critique, The Journal of Arabic Literature*, and *The Journal of Comparative South Asian, African, and Middle Eastern Studies*. He has also written on the contemporary politics in Lebanon and academic repression in the United States. In addition to his scholarship, Prof. Sheehi has also been active in social justice movements in the Middle East and North America.

**SYNOPSIS**

*Islamophobia: The Ideological Campaign Against Muslims* examines the rise of anti-Muslim and anti-Arab sentiments in the West following the end of the Cold War through GW Bush’s War on Terror to the Age of Obama. Using “Operation Desert Storm” as a watershed moment, Stephen Sheehi examines the increased mainstreaming of Muslim-bating rhetoric and explicitly racist legislation, police surveillance, witch-trials and discriminatory policies towards Muslims in North America and abroad.

The book focuses on the various genres and modalities of Islamophobia from the works of rogue academicians to the commentary by mainstream journalists, to campaigns by political hacks and special interest groups. Some featured Islamophobes are Bernard Lewis, Fareed Zakaria, Thomas Friedman, David Horowitz, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Irshad Manji, George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, John McCain, Hilary Clinton and Barack Obama. Their theories and opinions operate on an assumption that Muslims, particularly Arab Muslims, suffer from particular cultural lacuna that prevent their cultures from progress, democracy and human rights. While the assertion originated in the colonial era, Sheehi demonstrates that it was refurbished as a viable explanation for Muslim resistance to economic and cultural globalization during the Clinton era. Moreover, the theory was honed into the empirical basis for an interventionist foreign policy and propaganda campaign during the Bush regime and continues to underlie Barack Obama’s new internationalism.
If the assertions of media pundits and rogue academics became the basis for White House foreign policy, Sheehi also demonstrates how they were translated into a sustained domestic policy of racial profiling and Muslim-baiting by agencies from Homeland Security to the Department of Justice. Furthermore, Sheehi examines the collusion between non-governmental agencies, activist groups and lobbies and local, state and federal agencies in suppressing political speech on US campuses critical of racial profiling, US foreign policy in the Middle East and Israel. While much of the direct violence against Muslims on American streets, shops and campuses has subsided, Islamophobia runs throughout the Obama administration. Sheehi, therefore, concludes that Muslim and Arab-hating emanate from all corners of the American political and cultural spectrum, serving poignant ideological functions in the age of economic, cultural and political globalization.

REVIEWS

"Sheehi’s analysis of Islamophobia as an ideological formation brings a much needed dose of fresh air, and analytical clarity... A worthy update of Said’s seminal discussion of Orientalism and one that leaves few players in the contemporary foreign policy establishment, in particular so-called liberals, unscathed.”

MARK LEVINE, author of Why They Don’t Hate Us and Heavy Metal Islam

"[A] brilliantly synthetic work; a gift to all who struggle to understand the anti-Muslim sentiment so pervasive in contemporary America. In a richly detailed yet accessible manner, Sheehi tackles post-Cold War American Islamophobia in all of its complexity, weaving together its liberal and neoconservative strands, and illustrating that we must interrogate it not as a problem of “prejudice” or “misunderstanding,” nor as a debate about Islam itself, but as an ideological paradigm used to structure and justify U.S. policies, both domestic and international."

NATSU TAYLOR, author of Meeting the Enemy: American Exceptionalism and International Law
"...the value of this book is incalculable, and Stephen Sheechi is due our deepest thanks and admiration for his courage in writing it."

from the Foreword by WARD CHURCHILL.
All of this said, Islamophobia is not a political ideology in itself nor is it an isolated dogma just as Islam itself is not a political ideology. Islamophobia does not have a platform or even a political vision. Islamophobia is something more substantive, abstract, sustained, ingrained and prevalent. This book contends that Islamophobia is an ideological formation. This does not mean that it is the purview of any particular political party. Rather, an ideological formation is created by a culture that deploys particular tropes, analyses and beliefs, as facts upon which governmental policies and social practices are framed. This book argues that Islamophobia, in its current form, is a new ideological formation that has taken full expression since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Islamophobia does not originate in one particular administration, thinker, philosopher, activist, media outlet, special interest group, think tank, or even economic sector or industry though indeed, these actors are collectively responsible for the virulent dissemination of anti-Muslim and anti-Arab stereotypes and beliefs, circulated in order to naturalize and justify US global, economic and political hegemony. The Bush administration unabashedly wore its disdain for Muslims and Arabs on its sleeve from the first day of his administration. The subsequent chapters will show that even the Clinton and Obama administrations are rife with Islamophobic paradigms and acts that couple with a similarly imperial American outlook. Indeed, we have witnessed the unprecedented mainstreaming of Islamophobia since 9/11. An extremist flake such as Robert Spencer, for example, has authored two vitriolic, racist screeds on Islam that became New York Times bestsellers while Bruce Bawer’s incendiary and hackneyed The Enemy Within was nominated by the prestigious National Book Critics Circle for the best book of criticism.11

While scholars, activists and community groups as well as projects such as
Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting have taken on the ideological hacks and pseudo-intellectuals in the mainstream, this book adopts a different tack. Rather than understanding Islamophobia as a series of actions and beliefs that target Muslims and arise from a generic misunderstanding of who Muslims are and what Islam is, it reveals that Islamophobia is an ideological phenomenon which exists to promote political and economic goals, both domestically and abroad. The effects of Islamophobia can be a series of acts institutionalized by the United States government ranging from war to programmatic torture to extrajudicial kidnappings, incarcerations and executions to surveillance and entrapment. The effects of Islamophobia are experienced in the daily lives of Muslims who encounter harassment, discrimination and hate speech in the street, anti-Muslim rants on nationally syndicated television and radio shows, and hate acts such as mosque bombings. These effects, however, will only be understood as scattered albeit tangentially related acts if they are not seen to be located in a complete paradigm or discourse of Islamophobia that permeates American culture and society.

For these effects to work in unison with a rhetoric that justifies them, Islamophobia must act concurrently on two levels; the level of thought, speech and perception; then, the material level of policies, violence and action. Therefore, this book is structured by a dual methodology that excavates how Islamophobia operates as a powerful ideological formation that facilitates American Empire. On the one hand, the book anchors its analysis on works by Bernard Lewis and Fareed Zakaria, on "native informants" such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Irshad Manji, and on speeches by presidents Bush and Obama as well as their cabinet members and underlings whose analyses and political philosophies provide the discursive bedrock that naturalizes and justifies Islamophobia as state, foreign, security, economic and energy policy, domestically and abroad.

To streamline the massive, multifaceted ideological edifice of Islamophobia, two similar but
competing paradigms of Islamophobia by Bernard Lewis and Fareed Zakaria will be mapped out. As bears repeating, these two are certainly not progenitors of the Islamophobic narratives deployed post 9/11, but arguably their work condenses Islamophobic narratives that have previously circulated and accumulated over the preceding decade. Lewis and Zakaria distilled many Islamophobic tenets into two separate but intersecting Islamophobic discourses that explicitly intend to legitimize the deployment of US political power in the Middle East and the control of its own domestic populations. The talking points within these two versions of Islamophobia are continually repeated throughout the mainstream media, in policy circles, and by native informants (persons of Muslim or Arab descent who are purportedly best placed to lay bare an inside view or critique of Arab/Islamic culture), but more importantly, echo in the speeches of Bush and Obama.

On the other hand, this book will show how these Islamophobic discourses have very real effects. In other words, the words of Islamophobia are the raw materials for the sticks and stones that break Muslim bones. Through engineering, managing, mediating and directing Euro-American hatred and fear of Muslims and Arabs inside the US and globally, new levels of domestic control and surveillance could be achieved. Domestic policies that previously would have been considered unconstitutional, even un-American, could be justified as necessary matters of security and self-preservation. Torture (from water-boarding to extreme isolation of American defendants in the United States), racial profiling, kidnapping and extraordinary renditions, extrajudicial assassinations, freezing habeas corpus, and total war against and occupation of sovereign countries are the effects of the deployment of Islamophobic foils, stereotypes, paradigms and analyses.

This book will examine the violent and not-so-subtle effects of Islamophobia, particularly how attacks on Muslims and Arabs in the US are multipronged. Government organizations and
agencies work with the legislature, the Executive and even the judiciary in targeting, profiling and disenfranchising Muslim and Arab Americans of their Constitutional rights. Political interest groups, lobbies and political action committees work with local, state and federal authorities to isolate, intimidate and harass Muslim communities, student organizations, activists, and scholars. Likewise, the media efficiently disseminates overtly anti-Muslim propaganda that demonizes Muslims and Arabs and amplifies mainstream hostility to Islam and its adherents. We will also see how against the backdrop of a sheet of Muslim-hating white noise, extremist acts are committed against Muslims, Arabs and minorities who are mistaken for them.

Indeed, the book is not comprehensive. Unfortunately, the list of anti-Arab and Islamophobic hate acts, speech, activists, legislators and incidents are far too numerous to review. If this book were to name the litany of Islamophobic acts committed by the government, private citizens, public organizations and Hollywood and the media, then it would be a tome-like catalogue of hate. While diligently tracking Arab-hating and Islamophobia is important, this book hopes to crack open the complexities of the ideological formation itself, to understand how it is constructed and organized, and critically observe how it is manifested in American society. For this reason, Islamophobia is defined and examined in terms of discursive archetypes taken in the form of two master-narratives as provided by Lewis and Zakaria. Rather than discuss every Islamophobic rogue pseudo-scholar, political hack, charlatan native informant, opportunist pundit or activist journalist, the works of a handful of Islamophobes serves to define the scaffolding upon which Islamophobic acts and policies are grafted and American foreign and domestic policies find justification.
THE NATION (July 2/9, 2012).


Islamophobia: Anatomy of an American Panic

The Nation has a special issue entitled "Islamophobia: Anatomy of an American Panic" with articles examining different aspects of Islamophobia in the US. These include Moustafa Bayoumi, "Fear and Loathing of Islam", Jack Shaheen, "How the Media Created the Muslim Monster Myth" (subscription only), Petra Bartosiewicz, "Deploying Informants, the FBI Stings Muslims", Laila Lalami, "Islamophobia and Its Discontents", Abed Awad, "The True Story of Sharia in American Courts", Ramzi Kassem, "The Long Roots of the NYPD Spying Program", Max Blumenthal, "The Sugar Mama of Anti-Muslim Hate", and Laila Al-Arian, "When Your Father Is Accused of Terrorism".
September 25, 2012

Boykinism: Joe McCarthy Would Understand
By Andrew J. Bacevich
http://aep.typepad.com/american_empire_project/2012/09/boykinism.html?et_cid=29569951&et_rid=525719007&linkid=http%3a%2f%2faep.typepad.com%2famerican_empire_project%2f2012%2f09%2fboykinism.html%23more#more

First came the hullaballoo over the “Mosque at Ground Zero.” Then there was Pastor Terry Jones of Gainesville, Florida, grabbing headlines as he promoted “International Burn-a-Koran Day.” Most recently, we have an American posting a slanderous anti-Muslim video on the Internet with all the ensuing turmoil.

Throughout, the official U.S. position has remained fixed: the United States government condemns Islamophobia. Americans respect Islam as a religion of peace. Incidents suggesting otherwise are the work of a tiny minority -- whackos, hatemongers, and publicity-seekers. Among Muslims from Benghazi to Islamabad, the argument has proven to be a tough sell.

And not without reason: although it might be comforting to dismiss anti-Islamic outbursts in the U.S. as the work of a few fanatics, the picture is actually far more complicated. Those complications in turn help explain why religion, once considered a foreign policy asset, has in recent years become a net liability.

Let’s begin with a brief history lesson. From the late 1940s to the late 1980s, when Communism provided the overarching ideological rationale for American globalism, religion figured prominently as a theme of U.S. foreign policy. Communist antipathy toward religion helped invest the Cold War foreign policy consensus with its remarkable durability. That Communists were godless sufficed to place them beyond the pale. For many Americans, the Cold War derived its moral clarity from the conviction that here was a contest pitting the God-fearing against the God-denying. Since we were on God’s side, it appeared axiomatic that God should repay the compliment.

From time to time during the decades when anti-Communism provided so much of the animating spirit of U.S. policy, Judeo-Christian strategists in Washington (not necessarily believers themselves), drawing on the theologically correct proposition that Christians, Jews, and Muslims all worship the same God, sought to enlist Muslims, sometimes of fundamentalist persuasions, in the cause of opposing the godless. One especially notable example was the Soviet-Afghan War of 1979-1989. To inflict pain on the Soviet occupiers, the United States threw its weight behind the Afghan resistance, styled in Washington as “freedom fighters,” and funneled aid (via the Saudis and the Pakistanis) to the most religiously extreme among them. When this effort resulted in a massive Soviet defeat, the United States celebrated its support for the Afghan Mujahedeen as evidence of strategic genius. It was almost as if God had rendered a verdict.

Yet not so many years after the Soviets withdrew in defeat, the freedom fighters morphed into the fiercely anti-Western Taliban, providing sanctuary to al-Qaeda as it plotted -- successfully -- to attack the United States. Clearly, this was a monkey wrench thrown into God’s plan.

With the launching of the Global War on Terrorism, Islamism succeeded Communism as the body of beliefs that, if left unchecked, threatened to sweep across the globe with dire consequences for
freedom. Those who Washington had armed as “freedom fighters” now became America’s most dangerous enemies. So at least members of the national security establishment believed or purported to believe, thereby curtailing any further discussion of whether militarized globalism actually represented the best approach to promoting liberal values globally or even served U.S. interests.

Yet as a rallying cry, a war against Islamism presented difficulties right from the outset. As much as policymakers struggled to prevent Islamism from merging in the popular mind with Islam itself, significant numbers of Americans -- whether genuinely fearful or mischief-minded -- saw this as a distinction without a difference. Efforts by the Bush administration to work around this problem by framing the post-9/11 threat under the rubric of “terrorism” ultimately failed because that generic term offered no explanation for motive. However the administration twisted and turned, motive in this instance seemed bound up with matters of religion.

Where exactly to situate God in post-9/11 U.S. policy posed a genuine challenge for policymakers, not least of all for George W. Bush, who believed, no doubt sincerely, that God had chosen him to defend America in its time of maximum danger. Unlike the communists, far from denying God’s existence, Islamists embrace God with startling ferocity. Indeed, in their vitriolic denunciations of the United States and in perpetrating acts of anti-American violence, they audaciously present themselves as nothing less than God’s avenging agents. In confronting the Great Satan, they claim to be doing God’s will.

**Waging War in Jesus’s Name**

This debate over who actually represents God’s will is one that the successive administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama have studiously sought to avoid. The United States is not at war with Islam per se, U.S. officials insist. Still, among Muslims abroad, Washington’s repeated denials notwithstanding, suspicion persists and not without reason.

Consider the case of **Lieutenant General William G. (“Jerry”) Boykin**. While still on active duty in 2002, this highly decorated Army officer spoke in uniform at a series of some 30 church gatherings during which he offered his own response to President Bush’s famous question: “Why do they hate us?” The general’s perspective differed markedly from his commander-in-chief’s: “The answer to that is because we’re a Christian nation. We are hated because we are a nation of believers.”

On another such occasion, the general recalled his encounter with a Somali warlord who claimed to enjoy Allah’s protection. The warlord was deluding himself, Boykin declared, and was sure to get his comeuppance: “I knew that my God was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God and his was an idol.” As a Christian nation, Boykin insisted, the United States would succeed in overcoming its adversaries only if “we come against them in the name of Jesus.”

When Boykin’s remarks caught the attention of the mainstream press, denunciations rained down from on high, as the **White House**, the State Department, and the **Pentagon** hastened to disassociate the government from the general’s views. Yet subsequent indicators suggest that, however crudely, Boykin was indeed expressing perspectives shared by more than a few of his fellow citizens.

One such indicator came immediately: despite the furor, the general kept his important Pentagon job as deputy undersecretary of defense for intelligence, suggesting that the Bush administration considered his transgression minor. Perhaps Boykin had spoken out of turn, but his was not a fireable offense. (One can only speculate regarding the fate likely to befall a U.S. high-ranking officer daring to say of Israeli Prime Benjamin Netanyahu, “My God is a real God and his is an idol.”)

A second indicator came in the wake of Boykin’s retirement from active duty. In 2012, the influential **Family Research Council** (FRC) in Washington hired the general to serve as the organization’s executive vice-president. Devoted to “advancing faith, family, and freedom,” the council presents itself...
as emphatically Christian in its outlook. FRC events routinely attract Republican Party heavyweights. The organization forms part of the conservative mainstream, much as, say, the American Civil Liberties Union forms part of the left-liberal mainstream.

So for the FRC to hire as its chief operating officer someone espousing Boykin’s pronounced views regarding Islam qualifies as noteworthy. At a minimum, those who recruited the former general apparently found nothing especially objectionable in his worldview. They saw nothing politically risky about associating with Jerry Boykin. He’s their kind of guy. More likely, by hiring Boykin, the FRC intended to send a signal: on matters where their new COO claimed expertise -- above all, war -- thumb-in-your-eye political incorrectness was becoming a virtue. Imagine the NAACP electing Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan as its national president, thereby endorsing his views on race, and you get the idea.

What the FRC’s embrace of General Boykin makes clear is this: to dismiss manifestations of Islamophobia simply as the work of an insignificant American fringe is mistaken. As with the supporters of Senator Joseph McCarthy, who during the early days of the Cold War saw communists under every State Department desk, those engaging in these actions are daring to express openly attitudes that others in far greater numbers also quietly nurture. To put it another way, what Americans in the 1950s knew as McCarthyism has reappeared in the form of Boykinism.

Historians differ passionately over whether McCarthyism represented a perversion of anti-Communism or its truest expression. So, too, present-day observers will disagree as to whether Boykinism represents a merely fervent or utterly demented response to the Islamist threat. Yet this much is inarguable: just as the junior senator from Wisconsin in his heyday embodied a non-trivial strain of American politics, so, too, does the former special-ops-warrior-turned-“ordained minister” with a passion for spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Notably, as Boykinism’s leading exponent, the former general’s views bear a striking resemblance to those favored by the late senator. Like McCarthy, Boykin believes that, while enemies beyond America’s gates pose great dangers, the enemy within poses a still greater threat. “I’ve studied Marxist insurgency,” he declared in a 2010 video. “It was part of my training. And the things I know that have been done in every Marxist insurgency are being done in America today.” Explicitly comparing the United States as governed by Barack Obama to Stalin’s Soviet Union, Mao Zedong’s China, and Fidel Castro’s Cuba, Boykin charges that, under the guise of health reform, the Obama administration is secretly organizing a “constabulary force that will control the population in America.” This new force is, he claims, designed to be larger than the United States military, and will function just as Hitler’s Brownshirts once did in Germany. All of this is unfolding before our innocent and unsuspecting eyes.

Boykinism: The New McCarthyism

How many Americans endorsed McCarthy’s conspiratorial view of national and world politics? It’s difficult to know for sure, but enough in Wisconsin to win him reelection in 1952, by a comfortable 54% to 46% majority. Enough to strike fear into the hearts of politicians who quaked at the thought of McCarthy fingering them for being “soft on Communism.”

How many Americans endorse Boykin’s comparably incendiary views? Again, it’s difficult to tell. Enough to persuade FRC’s funders and supporters to hire him, confident that doing so would burnish, not tarnish, the organization’s brand. Certainly, Boykin has in no way damaged its ability to attract powerhousees of the domestic right. FRC’s recent “Values Voter Summit” featured luminaries such as Republican vice-presidential nominee Paul Ryan, former Republican Senator and presidential candidate Rick Santorum, House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, and Representative Michele Bachmann -- along with Jerry Boykin himself, who lectured attendees on “Israel, Iran, and the Future of Western Civilization.” (In early August, Mitt Romney met privately with a group of “prominent social
Conservatives,” including Boykin.)

Does their appearance at the FRC podium signify that Ryan, Santorum, Cantor, and Bachmann all subscribe to Boykinism’s essential tenets? Not any more than those who exploited the McCarthyite moment to their own political advantage -- Richard Nixon, for example -- necessarily agreed with all of McCarthy’s reckless accusations. Yet the presence of leading Republicans on an FRC program featuring Boykin certainly suggests that they find nothing especially objectionable or politically damaging to them in his worldview.

Still, comparisons between McCarthyism and Boykinism only go so far. Senator McCarthy wreaked havoc mostly on the home front, instigating witch-hunts, destroying careers, and trampling on civil rights, while imparting to American politics even more of a circus atmosphere than usual. In terms of foreign policy, the effect of McCarthyism, if anything, was to reinforce an already existing anti-communist consensus. McCarthy’s antics didn’t create enemies abroad. McCarthyism merely reaffirmed that communists were indeed the enemy, while making the political price of thinking otherwise too high to contemplate.

Boykinism, in contrast, makes its impact felt abroad. Unlike McCarthyism, it doesn’t strike fear into the hearts of incumbents on the campaign trail here. Attracting General Boykin’s endorsement or provoking his ire probably won’t determine the outcome of any election. Yet in its various manifestations Boykinism provides the kindling that helps sustain anti-American sentiment in the Islamic world. It reinforces the belief among Muslims that the Global War on Terror really is a war against them.

Boykinism confirms what many Muslims are already primed to believe: that American values and Islamic values are irreconcilable. American presidents and secretaries of state stick to their talking points, praising Islam as a great religious tradition and touting past U.S. military actions (ostensibly) undertaken on behalf of Muslims. Yet with their credibility among Iraqis, Afghans, Pakistanis, and others in the Greater Middle East about nil, they are pissing in the wind.

As long as substantial numbers of vocal Americans do not buy the ideological argument constructed to justify U.S. intervention in the Islamic world -- that their conception of freedom (including religious freedom) is ultimately compatible with ours -- then neither will Muslims. In that sense, the supporters of Boykinism who reject that proposition encourage Muslims to follow suit. This ensures, by extension, that further reliance on armed force as the preferred instrument of U. S. policy in the Islamic world will compound the errors that produced and have defined the post-9/11 era.

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Rendall, Steve. Why Do They Hate Us Back?” Extra! (Nov. 2012)

“When considering ‘anti-American violence in the Muslim world,’ it would have been helpful to mention as context that such violence amounts to a tiny fraction of the mayhem visited on Muslims by the U.S. and NATO over the past decade.”

Nonviolent Islam

That is why “Islam” Means Peace: Understanding the Muslim Principle
of Nonviolence Today, the new book by Amitabh Pal, the managing editor of the Progressive, is so important. In addition to writing wonderful chapters on somewhat more well-known figures in the nonviolence world like Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Pal tells the story of many obscure Muslim peacemakers who deserve far more attention—such as Abdul Kalam Azad, who worked alongside Gandhi in India’s independence struggle, and Ibrahim Rugova, who led the Kosovar Albanians’ nonviolent movement against Milosevic.

For anyone not well-versed in Islam, Pal also provides a great primer on the Qur’an, the real meaning of jihad and how Islam actually spread around the world, effectively rebutting many of the most common myths about the religion. I recently interviewed Pal for Religion Dispatches about this hidden history and how the nonviolent movements in the Middle East are shaking up both the region and the way that the West perceives Islam. (from review by Eric Stoner)

END ISLAMOPHOBIA NEWSLETTER #1

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