

Worried about Muslims?

If so, you have lots of company. Televised reports of Muslims making a lethal assault on a U.S. consulate and others burning U.S. flags and effigies of America's president may convince you the right word is fear, not just worry.

Several years before these shocking images appeared on television, a Cornell University poll reported that nearly half of those surveyed want the civil liberties of all American Muslims curtailed. Polls taken since show American anti-Muslim passions still rising.

I was fifty-one and had served in Congress for ten years before I knowingly met a Muslim. Yet, after a life-changing experience on the Arabian peninsula in the 1970s, I realized just how unaware I had been. For the next decade on Capitol Hill, I was actively involved in U.S. policy in the Islamic world. More importantly, I had the good fortune to become personally acquainted with many Muslims. I am a Presbyterian, but after my elected career ended, I continued my political and personal interest in Muslims and their faith. I have come to these truths:

➤ Like Christians and Jews, Muslims worship the One God. Islam and democracy are compatible and complementary. Both rest on accountability, consultation, open discussion, delegation and consensus.

➤ Muslims honor biblical prophets, accord special esteem to Jesus and his mother the Virgin Mary, and recognize as sacred the scriptures revealed by Moses and Jesus.

> Muslim women, like men, have the right to obtain an education, own property engage in business, professions, and public life. If a society oppresses women or discriminates against them, it is in spite of Islam, not because of it.

➤ Sadly, some people who say they are Muslims - like some professed Christians and Jews - grossly violate rules and the rights of others. In doing so, they do not act as Muslims.

Today, America is home for at least six million Muslims, including leaders in business, the arts, education, law, and sports. Retired champion boxer Muhammad Ali is the world's most widely recognized American Muslim. Dr. Ahmed Zuwail, a Muslim scientist in California, recently received a Nobel Prize. In my opinion, virtually all Muslims are law-abiding citizens. Still, many Americans, especially those in our nation's heartland, have never knowingly had a conversation with a Muslim or read a verse from the Qur'an, Islam's Holy Book. Many non-Muslims wrongly associate Islam with violence, because news reports almost always mention religious affiliation when Muslims are involved, but rarely when people of other faiths are mentioned.

Why Islamophobia?

All U.S. Muslims I know are proud to be Americans. They wish to be good citizens and good neighbors. Then why the sudden surge of Islamophobia? The most powerful single factor was 9/11. The assault instantly killed nearly 3,000 people in buildings and aboard aircraft. It was a monstrous crime charged against a group of professed Muslims

from Saudi Arabia. It was condemned immediately by senior spokesmen for Islam in the United States at a news conference in Washington, D.C. To his credit, President George W. Bush warned the public against blaming Muslims for the assault. Muslims abhor terrorism. Most Americans are still unaware that suicide and killing innocent people are grave violations of Islamic teaching. Sadly, neither the condemnation nor the warning received much media attention. These statements were submerged in the televised tide of heartrending images of death and destruction on U.S. soil. This flood quickened the fast-rising American tide of anti-Muslim fury. Millions of Americans, unfamiliar with Islam but worried that other bombings may occur, wrongly looked with suspicion at all Muslims, some simply because the only men accused were professed Muslims.

In reaction to 9/11, President George W. Bush ordered costly but inconclusive wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, both Muslim countries. To date, U.S. deaths in these two wars plus those killed on 9/11, total 10,325, a terrible toll that Americans understandably mourn in somber, tearful nationwide ceremonies on September 11 each year.

Little noted in America is the awesome fact that Muslims killed by U.S. forces in Afghanistan and Iraq outnumber U.S. deaths by a ratio of 26 to one. Since 1975 – mostly in this century - American military personnel killed more than 260,000 Muslims, with little evidence that any had responsibility for 9/11 or committed other acts of terrorism. [Endnote: Harvard professor Stephen Walt, *Why do they hate us?* New Foreign Policy.com 11-20-09]. Mournful cries keep reverberating in homes in both America and the Middle East like menacing thunder. The shrieks of widows and mothers are the same in each region but far more frequent in Muslim countries than in American.

Who “hates our freedoms?”

In an attempt to justify the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, President George W. Bush made a grave error. He invented and broadcast widely an unfortunate stereotype, probably the most damaging one in recent history. He blamed the 9/11 suicide bombings on “terrorists who hate our freedoms.” This misstatement on motivation is explosive. It is a lie that is terribly wrong. I cannot identify any Muslim - here or abroad, “terrorist” or peacemaker - who hates America’s freedoms. All the Muslims I know love our freedoms dearly. but hate our policies they see as anti-Muslim, policies that, in effect, have led our forces to kill innocent Muslims by the tens of thousands. Due to its obvious implication, Bush’s declaration on motivation put all Muslims heavily and unfairly on the defensive. Bush repeated the lie on several public occasions. No doubt he misled many Americans - perhaps millions of them - into accepting it as the truth.

In the months following 9/11, while addressing more than 20 large gatherings, I learned that false images of Islam had become a major threat to our national well-being. Longtime Muslim friend Maha Zehrey of Lima, Ohio, summed up the challenge: “I frequently feel the sting of Muslim stereotypes, and I know I am not alone. U.S. Muslims are law-abiding citizens, but all now suffer from profiling, hateful remarks, ugly graffiti, and - sometimes – arson and other violence. It’s all very sad.”

The anti-Muslim tide quickly swept over a nation that woefully misinformed about Islam. In December 2012, fury descended into lethal hate. A deranged woman pushed a stranger she mistook for a Muslim into the path of a New York City subway train. He was crushed to death. The woman told police 9/11 made her hate all Muslims.

The most shocking evidence of Islamophobia surfaced in the 2004 Cornell University survey. It reported that 44 percent of U.S. citizens polled were so suspicious of Islam they wanted civil liberties of all U.S. Muslims curtailed. [Emdnote: Associated Press, Ithaca, NY, Dec 18, 2004, *Belleville News-Democrat*, p 7a] Excerpts: “About 27 percent of respondents said that all Muslim Americans should be required to register their location with the federal government and 26 percent said that mosques should be closely monitored by U.S. law enforcement agencies. Twenty-nine percent agreed that undercover law enforcement agents should infiltrate Muslim civic and volunteer organizations in order to keep tabs on their activities and fundraising. Conversely, 48 percent of respondents nationally said they do not believe that civil liberties of Muslim Americans should be restricted.” Most of those polled said they had no personal acquaintance with Muslims.

Six years later, anti-Islam passions were unchecked. A Gallup Poll in January 2010 reported that 43 percent of U.S. citizens admitted they were troubled about Islam. The pollsters said the 43 percent “was probably an underestimation.” [Footnote; Gallup Group, Religious News Service, Jan 25, 2010] Since then, legislators in more than 30 states introduced legislation designed to keep courts from making any reference to *sharia*, the Islamic body of law that is used in a number of Muslim countries. This was a knee-jerk reaction that reflects anti-Muslim hostility as well as ignorance of court procedures. Judges and lawyers must examine compliance with *sharia* when they deal with contracts, including marriages, made in Muslim countries where *sharia* is the official legal system. Endnote: *Blaming Islam* by John R. Bowen, p 99] To my knowledge, no U.S. Muslim recommends *sharia* as a replacement of the U.S. legal system, but surveys conducted annually by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) show anti-Muslim hate crimes and vandalism rising steadily.

FBI and Army are led astray

For several months, extreme anti-Islam passions reached mid-level U.S. military and civilian leaders attending a course taught by U.S Army Lt. Col. Matthew Dooley at the Joint Forces Staff College, Norfolk, Virginia. He misinformed classes by telling them Muslims “hate everything you stand for and will never coexist with you unless you submit.” He also declared that Islam, not just “Islamic radicals,” is the real enemy. He said Muslim holy cities Mecca and Medina and other population centers may need to be “destroyed” by bombings without regard to civilian losses. Dooley was relieved of teaching duties in late April 2012.

Ugly stereotypes of Muslims even infected FBI training manuals until 2011. Agents were warned that “mainstream” U.S. Muslims are likely to be terrorist sympathizers and the more “devout” a Muslim, the more likely he or she is to be “violent.” [Endnote: *USA Today*, 5-11-12 p 10a]. In August 2012, a career UN employee, during a holiday in

Minnesota, invited an acquaintance of early school days to visit her in Marrakech, Morocco, where she has established her retirement home. Her friend, taken aback, responded, "Is it safe to visit a Muslim country full of terrorists, that is, for peaceful people - I mean Christians?" The retiree was shaken by the response. The response conveyed ignorance of Morocco and Islam, and bigotry deepened by unwarranted fear.

The burning of flags and effigies was triggered in part by a short film produced in America that made a demeaning reference to Prophet Muhammad, who is revered by all Muslims. They believe God revealed directly to the Prophet the text of the Qur'an. They consider him above criticism. All Muslims who have contacted me in the wake of recent Muslim violence say they strongly object to the film but also strongly condemn violent protests.

The violence may partly express pent-up Muslim fury over U.S. complicity in the plight of Muslims in Palestine and U.S. acts of war that have caused the death of tens of thousands of Muslims in recent years. Recently, our forces have begun selective killings via drones in three more Muslim countries, Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. The goal is killing the leadership of Al Qaeda, cited by our government as a terrorist group. The drone killings are controversial, because they are carried out with no judicial review or other forms of due process. The victims are all Muslims, a fact that tends to reinforce Islamophobia.

Pent-up fury

In this time of stress and deep controversy, Islam is a likely target of misinformed people hunting for someone to blame. Most Americans know little or nothing about Islam. A Pew Research study issued in 2009 included these findings: "People who know a Muslim are less likely to see Islam as encouraging of violence; similarly, those who are most familiar with Islam and Muslims are most likely to express favorable views of Muslims and to see similarities between Islam and their own religion."

Deeply disturbed by the depth of anti-Islam passions, I decided to write this report of my personal experience with Muslims. A month after making that decision, an unexpected but timely email provided a welcome glimpse of a Muslim family whose members carefully follow Islamic rules. It was from Maha Zehery, who described a recent classroom experience. Students in an English class at the Ohio State University in Lima first viewed a film portraying a Muslim scoundrel father abusing his wife and daughter. He then introduced Zehery, who spoke about her childhood in Egypt and adult life in America. Here are some of her comments:

"The Islam I know is a peaceful religion. In my childhood in Egypt, my parents taught us to treat people right, take care of the poor, be good to thy neighbor, don't lie, treat animals kindly. The list goes on and on. My Dad always treated my Mom with dignity and pride. She was equal with my Dad in all major household or family decisions. We were taught that Muslims, Jews, and Christians are all People of the Book, and that we must respect and cherish these two religions, not just Islam. Many in the West wrongly believe Muslim women are oppressed. Not true. In Islam, a woman has the right to

choose her husband. She has the right to seek divorce. Mothers are put on a high pedestal.”

Zahery and her young family came to America in 1982, several months before my congressional career ended. She described to the students her family’s reaction to the horror of 9/11 and its aftermath:

“Late that night our teenage son knocked on our bedroom door and said he couldn’t sleep. In tears, he said every time he closed his eyes he imagined people in wheel chairs who couldn’t leave burning buildings and other people jumping from windows to certain death. We had a sleepless night. We mourned for all the innocent people that were killed. And we condemned the suicide bombings. Unfortunately, publicity showed the atrocities of 9/11 were falsely committed in the name of our religion. The truth is the criminals who carried out 9/11 violated Islamic teachings. Still, for us, 9/11 had a silver lining. Muslims begin speaking out to explain our religion. In earlier years, we were passive and remained silent when Hollywood and others stereotyped us. Now we have finally started to inform fellow Americans the truth about Islam.” Her parting words: “Please remember you will find in every religion, culture, nationality, and community the good, the bad, and the ugly.”

When she finished, the students jumped to their feet and applauded. Two months later, their teacher reported: “In paper assignments, a number of students observed that, prior to attending the class, they held what they now recognize to be stereotypical views of Islam.”

Her report of an idyllic Muslim childhood and youth may not be typical of Muslim families, especially in countries where tribal rites are sometimes mixed with Islamic rules. But her description gave students an outline of behavior prescribed in the Qu’ran. I hope many other classrooms have an opportunity to experience an accurate report on Islam.

Congress never considers reforming the bias in U.S. Middle East policy, despite the rising threat posed by false images of Islam. A 2011 survey by the Council on American-Islamic Relations reports a high state of fear: “On a scale of one to ten, with one being America free of Islamophobia, and ten being the worst possible situation for Muslims...the current reading is 6.4.” [Endnote: CAIR Hate-Target 1-2011] Once revered worldwide, America is now widely reviled. Our government is sinking in an engulfing quagmire of brutal bias.

On the bright side

The scene is not hopeless. I cite positive developments from personal experience. In 2011, Dubai philanthropist Khalaf al Habtoor sponsored an Illinois College student essay contest on East-West relations and permanently endowed an annual lecture series on the same theme. The Hope Foundation, established by the late scholar Fahim Qubain, has placed scores of Palestinian students, virtually all Muslim, in U.S. colleges. Five of them have enriched campus life at my alma mater, Illinois College in Jacksonville, Illinois.

Last year, one of them, Muslim Jaffar Qutob, was elected chaplain of a college literary society by his all-Christian fellow members. Another one, Samer Anabtawa, in May 2012 graduated *summa-cum laude*.

In 2006, Keith Ellison, a Democrat from Minnesota, made history: the first Muslim elected to Congress. Four years later, Andre Carson, also a Democrat, became the second. During Ellison's second term, according to *The National Journal*, "Democratic congressional leaders" rated him fourth among "most admired" House members. In 2010, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg warned, "We would betray our values and play into our enemies' hands if we were to treat Muslims differently from anybody else." Television humorist Jon Stewart of the Daily Show mocked Islamophobia: "Why does everyone say America is divided? It appears distrust of Muslims is the only thing that goes from sea to sea." In 2012, former Republican presidential nominee Senator John McCain publicly rebuked former Republican presidential hopeful Rep. Michelle Bachmann for making an unfounded warning that a domestic Muslim "conspiracy" threatens America.

A patriotic tie that binds

In 1989, just before completing a lecture schedule in South Africa, I recognized a man working at a desk in an office building in Durban. I had met him at a reception the previous evening. When I greeted him, he smiled and spoke only two sentences: "I want you to know that Muslims revere the opening sentiments in your Declaration of Independence." Then he recited them from memory: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among them are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

That is all he said. He stated the words as if expressing a profound belief. I knew what he meant. Eighty years ago, all members of my fourth grade elementary school class were required to memorize the words he recited. As I continued my travels through Islam, to my surprise, several other Muslims volunteered references to the declaration. Each spoke with feeling. One of them recited the words from memory.

The author of the anti-Muslim FBI training documents and Lt. Col. Dooley could benefit from a serious chat with a Muslim about our Declaration of Independence. So could Rev. John Hagee, pastor of the 19,000-member Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, where he often rails from his pulpit against Islam. Imagine their surprise when they learn that Muslims revere America's great charter of liberty. This endorsement can help any misinformed American discover common ground with the Muslims they now fear and distrust. If widely presented, it could halt and even reverse Islamophobia.

Towering over hopeful signs is a threatening storm: the immense public support for curbing the civil liberties of all U.S. Muslims. It is a wakeup call everyone should heed. I am not a Muslim, but I feel Islamophobia is a disease that threatens my personal well-being as an American. Stereotypes that falsely portray religion grow fast, root deeply and are difficult to eradicate. They threaten the safety and future of all Americans.

How you can help

As our society confronts anti-Muslim passions, waiting for tomorrow is not a good option. This crisis begs action now, and you, the reader, can make a difference. You can help stem the fearsome tide. The first step is easy. When your family finishes reading this booklet, loan it to others. Make sure it stays in circulation.

The second step requires a visit to a mosque some Friday noon. That is when Muslims gather for congregational prayer. You will be warmly welcomed - as I have been - to sit, watch and listen, then linger after the service for conversation. By reaching out a warm hand to Muslims, you will encourage them to undertake the vital task of explaining the truth about their religion to others. This final suggestion: When you encounter anyone expressing a false image of Islam, offer that person a copy of *Neighbors* and ask him [or her] to read it. Never leave home without a supply of *Neighbors* in your pocket.

I have high hopes for *Neighbors*. In my dreams, several hundred readers are loaning their copies to other people and planning to buy a new supply to distribute. Soon, many thousand readers will gain accurate information about U.S. Muslims. One reader at a time, the tide of Islamophobia will recede. Muslims will finally gain the respect and dignity all citizens deserve, and America will regain the high ground where it belongs.

With thanks for your attention and with confidence in America's vast future for good deeds

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The high price of bias

U.S.-initiated wars and the controversial drone killings have cast Islam in a bad, undeserved shadow. President George W. Bush, with congressional approval, ordered the war in Afghanistan and later another one in Iraq. They were called wars against "Islamist terrorists" who caused 9/11. The death toll of innocent Muslims and Americans is staggering. Lives lost cannot be expressed in dollars. Although far less important than lives lost, the financial cost to U.S. taxpayers has reached a staggering level. According to studies by *The Christian Science Monitor* and other sources, the compounded financial cost since 1975 of direct, unqualified support of biased policies in the Middle East to the disadvantage of Muslims is more than \$3.7 trillion.

The entire expense intensifies Islamophobia. The price of this bias, using the conservative end of each range, includes \$1.3 trillion as the compounded cost of direct U.S. aid to Israel since 1975, and \$2.4 trillion as the combined, compounded cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. America's current population of 311 million is the equivalent of 77 million families of four. Seventy-seven million divided into \$3.7 trillion equals \$48,181. That means your family's financial share of our government's biased Middle East policies is \$48,181.