



RESPONSE TO BOSTON GLOBE'S – 'An awakening for US Muslims'

By Youssef Haddad

Dear Derrick,

As a Lebanese-American, I feel concerned about issues involving Arabs, Middle Easterns, and Muslims. So allow me to comment on your article "An awakening for US Muslims".

It seems that at every turn we read articles or watch programs about how unfair we have been in this nation towards Muslims. This type of Michael Moorish presentation of sound bites and semi facts, although done well intentionally by some, is deceiving and destructive.

I will ask the subjects of your story if they were genuinely outraged by the events of 9/11? If so, where did we see the American-Arab-Muslims manifestation of this outrage? No street marches or massive protests were organized to condemn this barbaric act. On the contrary, looking back, we have only heard meaningless words of regrets followed immediately by eloquent justifications of the events as resulting from the United States' policies in the Middle East. These people to whom the United States has offered freedom and prosperity have their allegiance to Islam before America. Considering the grizzly circumstances at 9/11, the reaction of all Americans was the most civilized and sensible towards all Muslims while Islam, by the attestation of the perpetrators themselves, is the ideology behind this act and other acts of terrorism. Upon the shoulders of the Muslims lies the burden of proving the contrary. Osama Bin Laden and others do quote verses from the Koran to support their actions and to proclaim their Divinely-inspired will to eradicate all of us "Infidels". It is only human to be suspicious of those whose co-believers, inspired by their beliefs, are capable of committing such atrocities.

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The government and anyone who cares about the safety of this country should be vigilant especially of those who adhere to an ideology that proved its virulence beyond any shadow of the

doubt. Instead of lamenting the alleged harassments which do not exceed extended security checks, every American should be thankful that the added awareness has prevented a lot of attacks.

Derrick, the media should have its own awakening in understanding the size of the threat and should align behind the authorities in extracting all dangerous elements from our society. We are all inconvenienced by the extra measures of security. We all feel an infringement on our right to roam freely across this land. We are at an unconventional war against a merciless enemy. Our minimal sacrifices, for the sake of our own protection, are our contribution to the war effort.

As someone with an Arabic name I can attest that I was never treated differently. Many people like me do support this Administration's policies, the war in Iraq and the measures taken to improve our national security. Exploiting the issues of the treatment of Arab Muslims or Muslims in this country for political gains is unfair, hypocritical and unpatriotic.

God bless America,
Youssef Haddad

Boston Globe

'An awakening for US Muslims'

By Derrick Z. Jackson, Globe Columnist | July 28, 2004

HASHIM RAZA is a 38-year-old physician from St. Louis who, like a majority of Arab-Americans, voted for President Bush in 2000. Raza has voted Republican in every presidential election starting with Ronald Reagan in 1984. "I was always attracted to the Republican message of self-accountability, personal responsibility, low taxes, and staying out of international affairs," Raza said. This year he will vote for John Kerry. "After 9/11, things started adding up," he said at a reception yesterday for Muslim attendees to the Democratic National Convention hosted by the Islamic Society of Boston. "Muslims were unfairly targeted; we were presumed guilty; Ashcroft, Rumsfeld, and Cheney acted like they have no use for Muslims. The Republican Party has become a refuge for far-right religious extremists. I believe people like Bush senior were moderates. But now I feel the party has excluded me."

A year ago, Arif Gafur, a 52-year-old engineer for Shell Oil in Houston, did not know anything about being a delegate to the convention. Before 9/11, he and many of his professional friends were never involved in politics. But the aftermath of the terrorist attacks where many Muslims were detained, made him concerned. "America is the best country in the world, but it's not easy to be a Muslim," he said.

The invasion of Iraq, which Gafur said was "unnecessary," pushed him and several other South Asian Muslims to register 1,000 voters and elect delegates to district, state, and national delegations. Of the about 5,000 delegates to the convention, about 40 are Muslim and six are from Texas, including himself.

"Sometimes on Middle East policy, Kerry seems to come across as Bush Lite," Gafur said. "But on domestic policy, with the Patriot Act and the racial profiling of Muslims, the Muslim community was awakened to the fact that we had to get involved."

The Arab-American awakening could play a significant part in the Democrats' drive to put the Bush presidency to sleep. In the 2000 elections, Bush pledged to end profiling of Arab-Americans. Other Arab-Americans were put off by Gore's choice of Joe Lieberman, who is Jewish, as his running mate, fearing the choice signaled an unacceptable pro-Israel tilt by the Democrats. "To many Muslims, Bush just seemed to work harder for our vote," Gafur said.

In 2000, Bush won 46 percent of Arab-American votes, compared with 38 percent for Gore and 14 percent for Ralph Nader. But a July tracking poll conducted by Zogby International for the Arab American Institute found that only 25 percent of Arab-Americans say Bush should be reelected. Only 9 percent of Arab-Americans say Bush's policies concerning Israel and Palestine are good or excellent.

This could spell trouble for Bush if there are tight races in battleground states like Michigan, Florida, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, where Zogby predicts a half-million Arab-Americans will vote. It is trouble because families like the Khan family of Toledo, Ohio, have personally felt the sting of Bush's post-9/11 policies, even though they are the embodiment of the American dream.

Husband Abdul Hafeez and wife, Meena Khan, are both 62. He is a retired civil engineer. She is a retired librarian. Their two daughters, Zeenat, 29, and Zeba, 23, were with them at the reception. Zeba has a master's degree in Middle East studies from the University of Chicago, and Zeenat has a doctorate in public health from the University of Texas. Zeba recently spent a year studying in Syria. Zeenat recently moved to the Boston area and has become a state Democratic Party activist. They all originally supported Dennis Kucinich of Ohio for president.

All four members of the family say they have been singled out for antiterrorism searches in airports. Abdul Hafeez, Meena, and Zeba missed their flight to Boston because the father was pulled out of line and was not cleared until their flight was closed.

"In 35 years in this country I never had this experience," Abdul Hafeez said. Zeenat said, "When you can nullify the Bill of Rights, the current administration is out of control." Meena said, "All of the things America stands for, freedom, charity, rights, these are Muslim values, same as Christian values. But with all that's going on, how can you call this a Christian country?"

None of the attendees or delegates were naive that Kerry completely supports their views. Kerry has angered Arab-Americans for agreeing with significant parts of Bush's Israel/Palestine policy and his vote authorizing Bush to invade Iraq. What they hope is that Kerry's pledge not to be a unilateralist will mean he will at least listen to Muslims before acting.

Gulten Ilhan, 38, a philosophy professor at St. Louis Community College and a Missouri delegate, said: "After there were no weapons of mass destruction, after it was clear we were not there to liberate Iraqis, Bush has lost many Arab-Americans. We have no choice but to stay in Iraq now. But Bush cannot stay as president."

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