

## Post 9/11 challenges - Islamophobia

**Islamophobia may be defined as “alienation, discrimination, harassment and violence rooted in misinformed and stereotyped representations of Islam and its adherents.”**

- Thirty-nine percent Americans say they felt at least some prejudice against Muslims. The same percentage favored requiring Muslims, including U.S. citizens, to carry a special ID "as a means of preventing terrorist attacks in the United States." (TODAY/Gallup Poll - July 2006)

- The proportion of Americans who believe that Islam helps to stoke violence against non-Muslims has more than doubled since the attacks, from 14 percent in January 2002 to 33 percent today. (The Washington Post-ABC News Poll – March 2006)

- Some one-fourth (23 to 27 percent) of Americans consistently believe stereotypes such as: "Muslims value life less than other people," and "The Muslim religion teaches violence and hatred." only six percent of Americans have a positive first impression of Islam and Muslims. (CAIR Poll – March 2006)

Is this surprising? Unfortunately, it's not. Americans' attitudes about Islam and Muslims are fuelled mainly by political statements and media reports that focus almost solely on the negative image of Islam and Muslims. The vilification of Islam and Muslims has been relentless among segments of the media and political classes since 9/11. Politicians, authors and media commentators are busy in demonizing Islam, Muslims and the Muslim world. In the post 9/11 America attacking Islam and Muslims became the fashionable sport for the radio, television and print media. Unfortunately, the events of 9/11 were used as an excuse to greatly magnify the hostility toward Muslims and cloak it in pseudo-patriotism. Muslim-bashing has become socially acceptable in the United States.

Is Islamophobia, which may be defined as “alienation, discrimination, harassment and violence rooted in misinformed and stereotyped representations of Islam and its adherents,” a de facto state policy?

Six days after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and Pentagon Washington, President George W. Bush, who enjoys political backing of the Christian right, called his war on terror a “crusade,” for which he later apologized as a verbal slip. In his first press conference after the alleged London terrorist plot to blow up several aircraft on August 11, 2006, the president said, “this nation is at war with Islamic fascists.” **(1)**

As the alarmed and dismayed American Muslim community protested President’s remarks, the White House Press Secretary Tony Snow, adding insult to the injury, said the president will continue to use the phrase. Snow explained that Bush has gradually shifted from general rhetoric about a war on terrorism to the more specific "war with Islamic fascists." With the new description, Bush "tries to identify the ideology that motivates many organized terrorist groups," Snow concluded. **(2)**

Webster's Dictionary defines fascism as a system of government characterized by one party dictatorship that forcibly suppresses opposition. President Bush’s remarks linked Islam to the fascist Italian and German regimes of the 1920s. However, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff explained: “It might not be classic fascism as you had with Mussolini or Hitler. But it is a totalitarian, intolerant imperialism that has a vision that is totally at odds with Western society and our rules of law.” **(3)**

When the president uses the term “Islamic fascists” it conveys that fascism is rooted in Islam or fascism that is inspired by Islam. This is the way the Muslims will see it, regardless of what Bush

may claim he really means. And his insistence to use "Islamist fascists" leads Muslims to believe that the "crusade" against Islam, was not a verbal slip, but - in the words of Prof. Sam Hamod - a Freudian slip. **(4)**

The phrase, Islamist fascists, contrasted sharply with the words used by the British officials, who went out of their way to play down the religion and ethnic background of the terror suspects in the alleged London plot, characterizing them as criminals who did not represent the majority of British Muslim citizens.

Was President Bush's remarks of Islamic Fascists a cynical bid for votes in the election year? This MSNBC report gives some insight: The administration was under pressure to convince the public that controversial security measures, as well as military intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan were the right policies. Bush's approval ratings had been sagging and he had come under fire from conservative critics who have argued that his "war on terror" was too squishy, and losing impact with mainstream America. **(5)**

According to Harris Interactive Poll, President Bush's approval rating was just 34%. President Bush's approval rating was 38% in a Newsweek poll. Harris Poll also indicated that if elections for Congress were held today, 45% of Americans say they would vote for the Democratic candidate and 30% would vote for the Republican. **(6)** According to the Newsweek Poll, right now 53 percent of Americans would like to see the Democrats win control of Congress, compared to just 34 percent who wanted the Republicans to retain control. **(7)** Interestingly, the Democratic Party seized control of Congress in November 2006 elections.

Republican Senator Rick Santorum, who faced a difficult re-election battle against Democrat Bob Casey in November 2006, used "Islamic fascism" repeatedly. "In World War II we fought Nazism and Japanese imperialism," Santorum said in a high-profile speech at the National Press Club on July 20. "Today we are fighting Islamic fascism. They attacked us on Sept. 11, because we are the greatest obstacle in front of them to their openly declared mission of subjecting the entire world to their fanatical rule."

But this is not all. Anti-Islam bigotry remains a popular past time for public officials and personalities:

Attorney General John Ashcroft once said: "Islam is a religion in which God requires you to send your son to die for him. Christianity is a faith in which God sent his Son to die for you." **(8)**

Republican Colorado Congressman Tom Tancredo advocated nuking Islam's holiest place, Mecca, to get even with another terrorist attacks. He refused to apologize for suggesting the United States could target Muslim holy sites if radical Islamic terrorists set off multiple nuclear attacks in American cities. "It's a tough issue to deal with. Tough things are said. And we should not shy away from saying things that need to be said." **(9)** Tancredo was not the only congressman to suggest nuking the Muslims. Rep. Sam Johnson (R-TX) bragged to a crowd of veterans that he had advised Bush to nuke Syria. "Syria is the problem. Syria is where those weapons of mass destruction are, in my view. You know, I can fly an F-15, put two nukes on 'em and I'll make one pass. We won't have to worry about Syria anymore." **(10)** The two congressmen's remarks probably reflected a general mood of the American public that approves the use of atomic bombs, especially against terrorist targets as indicated by a 2005 Associated Press poll. **(11)**

And this tirade against Islam and Muslims continues. Colorado Rep. Jim Welker, a Republican, sent an e-mail to his constituents titled: "Beware of Islam in America." The text of his e-mail read, in part, "Can a devout Muslim be an American patriot and loyal citizen? Politically, no. Because

he must submit to the mullah, who teaches annihilation of Israel and destruction of America, the great Satan." (12)

To borrow from Trish Schuh, this state-sponsored smirking has trickled down to spawn a climate of recreational cruelty in the US military. Deputy Undersecretary of Defense, Lt. Gen. William Jerry Boykin propagated hate at the grassroots level in dozens of speeches to church groups, saying that the war on terror was actually spiritual warfare, with the enemy 'Satan' being embodied by Islam. Speaking of God versus Allah he said: "Well, you know what I knew, that my God was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God, and his was an idol." (13)

Dropping down the chain of command, Marine Corp Lt. Gen. James Mattis said it was "fun to shoot some people." His comment in a gathering of defense contractors in San Diego, California came in reference to fighting insurgents in Iraq where he commanded Marines during the battle for Fallujah in spring 2004. "Actually it's quite fun to fight them, you know. It's a hell of a hoot," Mattis said, prompting laughter from some military members in the audience. "It's fun to shoot some people. I'll be right up there with you. I like brawling." Mattis, who also commanded Marine expeditions in Afghanistan, went on to say: "You go into Afghanistan, you got guys who slap women around for five years because they didn't wear a veil....You know, guys like that ain't got no manhood left anyway. So it's a hell of a lot of fun to shoot them." (14)

In another hard-line tale for fighting "Islamic terrorists," flyers were posted on a California National Guard military base extolling the World War I General John Pershing as a hero for executing "Muslim terrorists" with bullets dipped in pig's blood, thus excluding them from Paradise. "Maybe it is time for this segment of history to repeat itself, maybe in Iraq?" stated the flyer that was posted outside a cubicle in the Guard's Civil Support Division. "The question is, where do we find another Black Jack Pershing?" Initially, the National Guard defended the flyer as "historically accurate," but later removed it because of concerns raised by some anti-war activists. (15)

### **The Christian Right**

The Christian Right leaders aligned with the Bush Administration also fanned the flames of fear and hatred. (16)

Attacks on Islam from the Christian Right escalated soon after 9/11 when the Rev. Franklin Graham labeled Islam a "very evil and wicked religion." Soon other evangelical leaders weighed in, using the "war on terrorism" as an opportunity to reignite historic Christian-Muslim tensions. Leading rightwing Baptist Jerry Falwell described Muhammad as a "terrorist" — remarks that helped spark deadly riots in India.

Televangelist Pat Robertson who sought the Republican presidential nomination in 1988, calls Prophet Mohammad as fanatic and describes Islam worst than Nazism. In September 2002 he said: "This man [Muhammad] was an absolute wild-eyed fanatic. He was a robber and a brigand." Two months later he adds on his Christian Broadcasting Network: "Somehow I wish the Jews in America would wake up, open their eyes and read what is being said about them...This is worse than the Nazis...Adolf Hitler was bad, but what the Muslims want to do to the Jews is worse." Yet in another broadcast in April 2006 he repeated this theme: "we are not listening to what Islam says, just as we did not listen to what Adolf Hitler said in *Mein Kampf*." Robertson claimed that we are ignoring the threats by "not only the radical Muslims but Islam in general," because "it is not politically correct to believe that any religious group would do what they claim they are going to do."

The Rev. Franklin Graham, chosen by George Bush to deliver the prayers at his presidential inauguration, says that the God of Islam is not the same God of Christians. In Nov. 2001 he said:

"We're not attacking Islam but Islam has attacked us. The God of Islam is not the same God. He's not the son of God of the Christian or Judeo-Christian faith. It's a different God, and I believe it is a very evil and wicked religion." In August 2002 he went a step further to say that the Quran teaches violence: "I believe the Qur'an teaches violence. It doesn't teach peace, it teaches violence." Franklin Graham reaffirmed his scorn for Islam again on March 15, 2006 when he told an interviewer of the ABC News "Nightline" that he hasn't changed his mind about Islam.

Evangelist Jimmy Swaggart called Mohammed a "sex deviant" and a pervert and demanded that Muslim students in the US be expelled. Jimmy Swaggart says: "I like our President but he's dead wrong when he says Islam or the Quran is a book of love and peace. Mr. President, that has got to be the most asinine, idiotic, ridiculous, utterly ludicrous statement that I've ever heard in my life....You know what we ought to do? We ought to take every single Muslim student in every college in this nation and ship them back to where they came from. And we ought to tell every other Muslim living in this nation, if you say one word, you're gone. You're gone." (17)

The record gets worse. Rev. Jerry Vines, former president of Southern Baptist Convention, says "[Muhammad was] a demon-possessed pedophile." (18) Rev. Jerry Vines argues: "And I will tell you Allah is not Jehovah, either. Jehovah's not going to turn you into a terrorist that'll try to bomb people and take the lives of thousands and thousands of people." (19) Televangelist Benny Hinn believes that the "the Muslim population is going down!...We are on God's side. This is not a war between Arabs and Jews. It's a war between God and the devil." (20)

Numerous surveys have found evangelicals in general to have more negative views on Islam than other Americans. This rhetoric is reflected in evangelical books and articles that have been published in the last decade, but particularly since 9/11. A new study by Richard Cimino, editor of Religion Watch newsletter, finds that this discourse sheds as much light on how evangelicals view the challenges of pluralism and relativism in American society as it does about their views on Islam. The study, entitled: "No God In Common: American Evangelical Discourse on Islam After 9/11," through an analysis of popular evangelical books published before and after 9/11, the study finds that most of the post-9/11 literature draws sharper distinctions between Islam and Christianity, as well as asserting that Islam is essentially violent. (21)

Yet in another example of Islamophobia, on July 22, 2002, a fundamentalist Christian organization, the American Family Association Center for Law and Policy and three anonymous students file a law suit against the University of North Carolina, Church Hall, because it required new students to read a book – the Quran an Early Revelation by Prof. *Michael A. Sells*. In their complaint, the plaintiffs claimed that UNC indoctrinates students with deceptive claims about the peaceful nature of Islam, violating the separation of church and state. A committee of the state legislature voted to terminate funding for the course. However, the lawsuit fizzled at on Aug.15, U.S. District Court judge Carlton Tilley, Jr., refused to grant a temporary restraining order. Syndicated talk show host Bill O'Reilly fuming against the University of North Carolina's decision said that it is like teaching UNC students Adolf Hitler's Mein Kampf. Freshmen shouldn't study "our enemy's religion," he added.

Rightist syndicated columnist Ann Coulter feeds into this frenzy even further. She suggests: "We should invade their [Muslim] countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity." (22) She advocates that the government deport Arabs and Muslims. "Congress could pass a law requiring that all aliens from Arabic countries leave. . .Congress could certainly pass a law requiring all aliens to get approval from the INS before boarding an airplane in the United States." (23) Her racist rhetoric labels all Muslims as being terrorists. She urges Muslims who want to avoid deportation to "spy" on fellow citizens: "Not all Muslims may be terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslim. . . There will be two fail-safes: (1) Muslim immigrants who agree to spy on the millions of Americans unaffected by the deportation order can stay; and (2) any Muslim immigrant who gets a U.S. Senator to waive his deportation - by name - gets to stay." (24)

And what message the Muslims got from the appointment of a well-known Islamophobist to the government think tank, the U.S. Institute of Peace. In April 2003 President Bush nominated Daniel Pipes, founder of the Anti-Islamist Institute to the board of the Institute. The nomination drew sharp criticism from the Muslim community and fellow Americans. Pipes has been repeatedly criticized in the mainstream American press and by scholars for his agenda-oriented low standards of data collection and unscholarly work. He repeatedly claimed that the majority of Muslims are troublesome, violent, terrorists, or terrorist-supporters. Despite being rejected by Congress amid wide criticism, President Bush made a recess appointment of Pipes to the Peace Institute Board in August 2003.

### **Islamophobia in 2008 Presidential race**

Closing months of 2007 witnessed an alarming increase in Islamophobia by the Republican political leaders who exploited the anti-Islam and anti-Muslim atmosphere prevailed in the post-9/11 America thanks to the government's internal and external policies as well as some political and religious leaders and agenda-driven media.

Republican presidential candidate Congressman Tom Tancredo reiterates considering "taking out Muslim holy sites" if another terror attack were to take place on American soil. Another Republican Presidential hopeful Senator John McCain says that the United States is a Christian nation and that his Christian faith is of better spiritual guidance than Islam. Yet another Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney rules out a cabinet position for a Muslim because of their small population.

At the same time, Republican Congressman Peter King, political advisor of another presidential hopeful, Rudy Giuliani, says that there are too many mosques in the United States and adds that the Muslims should be placed under FBI surveillance. New York Congressman King is a ranking Republican on the House Homeland Security Committee. Surprisingly, the front runner hopeful Giuliani endorsed his advisor's statement as Giuliani refused to ask King to retract his statement.

### **Muslim-bashing campaign at US campuses**

Not surprisingly, other bigots seized this opportunity to create hatred against Islam and Muslims.

In a bid to spread fear and hatred under the guise of patriotism and freedom of speech, David Horowitz, a neo-conservative polemicist, launched an Arab/Muslim-bashing campaign at campuses across the nation in October 2007. Borrowing from President Bush's terminology 'Islamofascists,' Horowitz packaged his anti-Arab/anti-Muslim campaign as "Islamofascist Awareness Week."

Horowitz asked students participating in the campaign to disseminate presentations, such as "The Islamic Mein Kampf," (meaning the Quran). In a throwback to McCarthyism, right-wing students were encouraged to issue press releases condemning those who refused to sign for the Islamofascist week. It means either you are with us or with our enemy.

But just who are the "Islamic fascists? According to Horowitz's FrontPage magazine, they include the Muslim Student Association, which has chapters on hundreds of U.S. campuses--and the Council on American Islamic Relations, which advocates for civil rights and tracks hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims.

There was a collection of bigots and crackpots that Horowitz had recruited to speak for the Oct 22-26 2007 Islamophobia week. Islamophobist right wing columnist Ann Coulter was one. Other luminaries included: Rick Santorum, a former US Senator, who has compared homosexuality to incest; Robert Spencer who claims Islam is "the world's most intolerant religion"; and noted anti-

Arab commentator and Islamophobe Daniel Pipes who once said that "Palestinians are a miserable people...and they deserve to be."

Some other well-known Islamophobic speakers were: Dennis Prager, Sean Hannity and Wafa Sultan. More intellectual takes came from such neoconservative icons of Middle East policy as Michael Ledeen who seeks to apply Machiavellian principles to the modern world.

Surely such a notorious lineup of racist, bigoted, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic and Machiavellian speakers did not serve to educate but to promote hatred and spread misinformation and lies.

### **Venom from the radio talk show hosts**

The cult of hatred against Islam and Muslims is manifesting in different sectors of the society.

The demonizing of Arabs and Muslims in America began well before the terrible tragedy of September 11, 2001. It can be traced to deliberate mythmaking by the Hollywood movies as enumerated by the Award-winning film authority Jack G. Shaheen in her book *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies* (2001), stereotyping as part of conscious strategy of 'experts' and polemicists on the Middle East, the selling of a foreign policy agenda by the US government officials and groups seeking to affect that agenda, and a public susceptible to images identifying the unwelcome 'other' in its midst. **(25)**

However, what is new after 9/11 is that now demonizing Muslims and Islam is not only more widespread but also considerably more mainstream and respectable.

While print and electronic media continues unabated campaign to smear Islam, radio talk show hosts are busy in spewing out venoms against Islam and Muslims. Even a higher court rules that a letter calling for killing Muslims is protected by the freedom of speech.

Los Angeles radio show host Bill Handel even made fun of the deaths of about 360 Muslim pilgrims during the January 2006 stampede in Mina, Saudi Arabia. Later Handel apologized for his remarks only under pressure from the Muslim civil rights group.

Nationally syndicated radio host Michael Savage called for "kill 100 million" Muslims. On his radio show, Savage told listeners that "intelligent people, wealthy people ... are very depressed by the weakness that America is showing to these psychotics in the Muslim world. They say, 'Oh, there's a billion of them.' " Savage continued: "I said, 'So, kill 100 million of them, then there'd be 900 million of them.' **(26)**

The host of a New York morning radio show and the rest of her on-air crew were suspended indefinitely in January 2005 for airing a tasteless song parody that mocked victims of the catastrophic south Asia tsunami. The song included references to "screaming chinks" and orphaned children "sold into child slavery." The chorus began, "So now you're screwed, it's a tsunami, you'd better run ... go find your mommy."

WMAL-AM radio host Geoff Metcalf says: "According to the Quran, believers in Islam are not required to tell infidels, and that's us, the truth. So they apparently have permission to lie when it is appropriate." On his July 25, 2005 program Graham parrots "Islam is a terrorist organization" 23 times. On the same show, he also said repeatedly that "moderate Muslims are those who only want to kill Jews" and that "the problem is not extremism. The problem is Islam." Most callers to the program expressed similar hostility to Muslims and to the faith of Islam. **(27)**

A "Kill Muslims" call got a boost from the Arizona state Supreme Court ruled that a Tucson newspaper could not be held liable for publishing a letter that urged people to kill Muslims to retaliate for the death of American soldiers in Iraq. In a 5-0 ruling, Arizona's highest court found

unanimously the Tucson Citizen was protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and could not be sued for printing the letter in December 2003. **(28)**

### Desecration of the Quran

In May 2005 American Muslims were shocked to know that their Holy book, the Quran has been desecrated by the US interrogators at the US detention center Guantanamo Bay. The revelation by the Newsweek drew worldwide Muslim reaction that compelled the magazine to retract its story about US interrogators flushing the Quran down a toilet at Guantanamo Bay. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld maintained that the revelation was not true, and demanded that Newsweek explain to the Muslim world "the care that the US military takes" to respect Islamic beliefs. But the desecration had been documented independently elsewhere. The Denver Post: prisoners were "forced to watch copies of the Koran being flushed down toilets" (January, 2005), Financial Times: "they were beaten and had their Korans thrown into toilets" (Oct 28, 2004), New York Daily News: "They would kick the Koran, throw it into the toilet and generally disrespect it." (Aug. 5, 2004), The Independent UK: "Guards allegedly threw prisoners' Korans into toilets" (Aug 5, 2004), The Observer UK: "copies of the Koran would be trampled on by soldiers and, on one occasion, thrown into a toilet bucket." (March 14, 2004), Washington Post: "American soldiers insulted Islam by sitting on the Koran or dumping their sacred text into a toilet to taunt them." **(29)**

These were but a few of similar media reports over a period of years. The desecration was also confirmed by the Geneva-based International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC). According to an ICRC spokesman the international body confidentially reported in 2002 and 2003 the incidents to U.S. authorities about American personnel at the Guantanamo Bay detention center showing disrespect the Quran. **(30)**

At the same time, detainees told FBI interrogators as early as April 2002 that mistreatment of the Quran was widespread at the Guantanamo military prison. According to the summaries of FBI interviews, obtained by the American Civil Liberties Union as part of an ongoing lawsuit, there were at least a dozen allegations that the Quran was kicked, thrown to the floor or withheld as punishment. One prisoner said in August 2002 that guards had "flushed a Quran in the toilet" and had beaten some detainees. **(31)**

Other instances of Quran's desecration were also recorded.

One online fundraiser sold printed toilet paper with the words "Koran, the Holy Quran" which was then distributed to mosques and the media with a letter claiming the Quran was a "cookbook for terrorists" and incited violence. An American Muslim woman - Azza Basarudin - who ordered a copy of the Quran from Amazon.com was shocked to receive one with the words "F\*ck this piece of sh\*t" and "Death to all Muslims" scrawled across the inside cover. **(32)**

In Backsburg, Virginia., a bag stuffed with burned Qurans was left in front of an Islamic center, shocking members when they arrived for prayers. The torched copies of the Muslim holy book were inside a plastic shopping bag that was placed at the center's front door sometime before prayers. **(33)**

In Tennessee, a video titled "kill the koran" was posted on MySpace.com showing two men shooting a Quran with a military rifle. The video was later tossed down outside a Chattanooga mosque. The footage first shows a man identified as mully88 holding a paperback Quran outside a Barnes & Noble Booksellers. The next scene, taped in a wooded area, shows mully88 and another man taking turns shooting the Quran with a rifle mully88 identifies as a Colt M-16. The final scene shows a man tossing the bullet-riddled book onto the sidewalk outside the Islamic Center. In his profile on the Web site, mully88 identifies himself as a 33-year-old college-educated Chattanooga resident working as a paramedic and mechanic. He says he would "love

to see the white race rule the world" and lists his heroes as "anyone who has killed a Muslim or tried to kill a Muslim." (34)

### Controversial cartoons

And here is a final take of the anti-Islam tirade.

Again to borrow from Trish Schuh, packaged in western free speech cliches, and marketed as innocent satire, a cheap shot was fired at Islam from Denmark in March 2006. In a "provocation-entrapment" propaganda, the Danish newspaper *Jylland-Posten* published controversial cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad as a terrorist/suicide bomber with a ticking bomb for a turban. Many other newspapers across Europe and America have joined the fray as what they disingenuously claim as 'demonstrations of freedom of expression.' Ironically, *Jylland-Posten* had refused to run cartoons of Jesus Christ fearing an outcry. Its editor says: "if the cartoon provoked an attack, it would only 'confirm the idiotic positions' of Muslim extremists." Predictably, there were widespread bloody protests throughout the Muslim world. When protests across the Muslim world became louder and some Muslim governments decided to pull off Danish products from their market, Europe appeared to be stunned by such reactions.

President Bush defended the publication of the controversial cartoons as free speech while condemned the protests which had swept the Muslim world. "We reject violence as a way to express discontent with what may be printed in the free press," Bush told reporters after a meeting with Jordan's King Abdullah II on Feb.8, 2006. Major US newspapers – the New York Post, Washington Post, USA Today refrained from joining the fray but the Philadelphia Inquirer, Austin American-Statesman and Rocky Mountain News were few papers which seized upon the free speech privilege.

I could go on giving more and more examples of Islamophobia in the post-9/11 America but conclude by saying that this avalanche of damaging association of Islam with terrorism and violence has increased Americans' prejudice against Islam and Muslims. Numerous opinion polls conducted after 9/11 indicated a steady rise in the sentiments against the Muslims and their faith among the fellow Americans. In February 2002 – less than six months after the terrorist attacks of September 11 – the country was evenly divided in its impression of Islam. Americans today are also more likely to believe that Islam encourages violence, at least in comparison to other religions around the world. Here are some opinion polls that echo the climate of hysteria that has been whipped up by the Bush administration and fuelled by the media and political and religious leaders:

Thirty-nine percent of respondents to the USA TODAY/Gallup Poll of August 2006 said they felt at least some prejudice against Muslims. The same percentage favored requiring Muslims, including U.S. citizens, to carry a special ID "as a means of preventing terrorist attacks in the United States." About one-third said U.S. Muslims were sympathetic to al-Qaeda, and 22% said they wouldn't want Muslims as neighbors. 31% said they'd feel more nervous flying if a Muslim man was on the plane; 18% said they'd be more nervous with a Muslim woman. (35)

Two polls released on March 9, 2006 indicate that almost half of Americans have a negative perception of Islam and that one in four of those surveyed have extreme anti-Muslim views. The results of the two polls – conducted by Washington Post-ABC and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) – were not unexpected as anti-Muslim and anti-Islam campaign continues unabated since 9/11 by print and electronic media along with politicians, religious leaders as well as the government policies that have reinforced Islamophobia which may be defined as "alienation, discrimination, harassment and violence rooted in misinformed and stereotyped representations of Islam and its adherents." The two polls come at a time of increasingly charged atmosphere: the proposed takeover of six US ports operations by a Dubai

firm (later abandoned); the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq with little sign of ending; the election of Hamas in the Palestinian territories; and, above all, the riotous protests across the Muslim world against Danish cartoons depicting Prophet Muhammad.

Although Americans believe they are better informed about Islam than they were five years ago, but an April 2006 CBS News poll finds fewer than one in five say their impression of the religion is favorable. Forty-five percent said they have an unfavorable view of Islam, a rise from 36 percent in February. And the public's impression of Islam has diminished even more compared with four years ago. **(36)**

In a shocking revelation to the American Muslims, a December 2004 poll finds nearly half of all Americans believe that the U.S. government should restrict the civil liberties of Muslim-Americans. The Cornell University poll found that 44 percent favored at least some restrictions on the civil liberties of Muslim Americans. The survey also showed that 27 percent of respondents supported requiring all Muslim-Americans to register where they lived with the federal government. Twenty-two percent favored racial profiling to identify potential terrorist threats. And 29 percent thought undercover agents should infiltrate Muslim civic and volunteer organizations to keep tabs on their activities and fund-raising. The poll also found that Republicans and people who described themselves as highly religious were more apt to support curtailing Muslims' civil liberties than Democrats or people who are less religious. Researchers also found that respondents who paid more attention to television news were more likely to fear terrorist attacks and support limiting the rights of Muslim-Americans. **(37)**

The poll result echoes the climate of hysteria that has been whipped up by the Bush administration and fueled by the media.

Since most Americans have little, if any, personal contact with Muslims, their views and opinions are shaped and shaded by what they absorb from the mass media particularly television network news channels. Mainstream movies, magazine periodicals, and newspaper articles also play a central role in fashioning Islamic prejudices and fears. "Our findings highlight that personal religiosity as well as exposure to news media are two important correlates for support of civil liberties," said Dr. James Shanahan, who is one of the authors of the Cornell Report. "We need to explore why these two very important channels of discourse may nurture fear rather than understanding." **(38)**

In this charged atmosphere it was not surprising that in March 2006 a mix of bigotry and political opportunism fuelled opposition to the \$6.8 billion sale of the London-based Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Co. to Dubai Ports World. P&O runs shipping terminals in Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia, New Jersey, Miami and New Orleans. Prejudice against Islam and Muslims allowed our politicians to whip a frenzy in rejecting the approval of the Dubai firm to operate American ports. Exploiting the security concerns, Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) went to the extent to announce in a New Jersey public rally: "We wouldn't transfer the title to the devil; we're not going to transfer it to Dubai." During the whole Dubai ports deal debacle, even the Democratic Party leaders engaged in unfounded scare mongering to score political points. The hysteria surrounding the Dubai deal issue demonstrates how Islamophobia was used by some politicians to force the cancellation of a normal business deal.

### **Permission to build new mosques & expansion of mosques denied**

The conclusion that flows from this analysis is that the Islamophobia has created an atmosphere of suspicion among the fellow Americans towards the Muslims. One impact of Islamophobia was negative public reaction to the building of new mosques and expansion of the existing ones. In many cases permission to build a new mosque or expansion of the existing mosques was resisted by communities conditioned by the anti-Islam and anti-Muslim rhetoric.

The Islamic Society of Boston was trying to complete a mosque that would be the largest (70,000-square-foot) in this region of the United States. After the city of Boston conveyed a parcel of land to the Islamic Society of Boston (ISB), articles appeared in the Boston Herald in 2003 linking society leaders to Islamic extremists. Boston's Fox TV station followed with broadcasts on the charges, and two local organizations - the David Project, a pro-Israel group, and Citizens for Peace and Tolerance (CPT) - continued to publicize them and pressed for public hearings. CPT claimed that Boston could become a "potential radical Islamic center." The ISB countered that media and local groups, with help from terrorism analyst Steven Emerson, have conspired to halt construction and "incite public sentiment against area Muslims." A local resident also sued the city seeking invalidation of the land sale to the ISB. "It's all part of the unfortunate temper of the times," says John Esposito, a professor at Georgetown University in Washington. "There is such a thing as Islamophobia." **(39)** On May 30, 2007, the two sides in the legal dispute about the construction of a Boston mosque agreed to drop legal actions against each other, a move will allow construction to move forward. The decision came three months after a Suffolk Superior Court judge dismissed a lawsuit by Boston resident James Policastro claiming it was unconstitutional for the city of Boston to sell land at a discount price to developers of an Islamic center. **(40)**

On March 5, 2007, Goldsboro City Council (North Carolina) unanimously voted not allow the construction of a mosque in the northern part of the city. All six councilmen and Mayor Al King agreed with the planning commission's recommendation that the building plan was too large for the proposed site off Wayne Memorial Drive and the facility would not provide the required number of parking spaces. Dr. Waheed Akhtar asked City Council last month to rezone his property on the southeast corner of Best Avenue and Wayne Memorial Drive to allow for the construction of a mosque. Akhtar said the building was necessary because he and other Wayne County Muslims have to travel to Greenville or Raleigh to worship. The plans called for a 2,050-square-foot facility that would only be open for a few hours on Fridays and Sundays to prevent traffic congestion along Wayne Memorial Drive. During a public hearing on Feb. 19, 2007, some of those opposed to the mosque did cite traffic concerns, but others simply did not want a mosque in their neighborhood. **(41)**

A South Florida man fighting the opening of a mosque in his suburban neighborhood filed a lawsuit in May 2007 to try and halt construction, a move derided by Arab leaders as anti-Muslim. Rodney Wright claims the relocation of the Islamic Center of South Florida to a new, larger building in his Pompano Beach neighborhood "presents a substantial harm to the well-being, safety and health" of the community. Wright identifies himself as a Christian. The lawsuit claims the leader of the mosque, Imam Hassan Sabri, has repeatedly been associated with others who are tied to terrorist groups including Hamas, al-Qaida and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, though the connections outlined in the filing appear loose and there is no accusation of direct wrongdoing. Sabri has not been charged with any criminal wrongdoing and neither he nor his mosque have been the target of any publicized investigation. "I'm very much disturbed that in this day and age you'd find people going to such extreme measures to prevent a house of worship from being built in any American city," said Altaf Ali, executive director of the South Florida chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, which is also named as a defendant in the lawsuit. **(42)**

After facing what it saw as anti-Muslim sentiment at a public hearing in March 2006, a Turkish organization dropped its plan to turn a vacant school in South Park, Pennsylvania, into a cultural center. "As a group that promotes peace and dialogue, we have never encountered such negativity in our long history here," the West Penn Cultural Center board said in a statement. The group withdrew its application for a permit to turn the old Broughton Elementary School into a facility where members of the Turkish community could adapt to American culture while maintaining Turkish traditions and language. They also planned to worship in one of the classrooms on Friday afternoons. At the public hearing, some residents said they didn't want the cultural center to renovate the school, claiming Islamic centers and mosques can harbor sleeper cells of terrorists. The group bought the graffiti-covered, boarded up school for \$100,000 and

planned to make about \$300,000 in improvements. In a letter to the editor published by the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, a resident of South Park demanded that the cultural group openly denounce radical Islam and terrorism if it hopes to be accepted in South Park. **(43)**

The plans for (Michigan) Warren's first mosque were approved in April 2006 after heated discussion by the Planning Commission which once rejected the plan. During the two-hour session when plan was finally approved, one Warren resident was loudly applauded for demanding that the developer prove the Islamic Organization of North America won't have ties to terrorists. **(44)**

Upholding a decision by the borough's Board of Adjustment, a Superior Court Judge in May 2006 denied the Muslim Center of Somerset (NJ) a conditional use variance. The ruling was the latest in a step of obstacles the Center had faced in its quest to run operations out of small house on Southside Avenue. Had the judge approved the request, his decision would have cleared the way for the county's first mosque. The Center acquired the Southside Avenue property in 1998 and had used the facility as a home for its imam -- or spiritual leader -- and as a place for its five daily prayer services. When the borough realized the Center was in violation of parking ordinances, the center applied for variances and site plan approval, which included a proposal for a small expansion. Since then, the Center has been renting space at the Redwood Inn in Bridgewater and the Manville Elks for its services. The board rejected the application in June 2005, but when the Center sued the borough and board, Superior Court Judge Peter Buchsbaum ordered the board to revisit the application, this time considering its beneficial use. But even with conditions in place, the board found the mosque put too much of a burden on the residential neighborhood and denied the application for a second time. **(45)**

A plan to build a mosque in the Houston suburb of Katy was blown up into a neighborhood dispute, with community members warning the place will become a terrorist hotbed and one man threatening to hold pig races on Fridays just to offend the Muslims. One resident had set up a Web site against the mosque project. A committee was formed to buy another property and offer to trade it for the Muslims' land. The Islamic Society of Greater Houston bought the 11-acre site in Katy in September 2006 for \$1.1 million. Katy, population 13,000, is 70 percent white and 24 percent Hispanic. **(46)**

In July 2006, the Albanian Associated Fund of Paterson, New Jersey, filed a discrimination lawsuit filed saying that the township officials stalled approving the 4,715-square-foot mosque and 7,957-square-foot school for nearly four years at the planning board level, imposing unusually stringent requirements and several delays. About five years ago, the group bought 11 acres in the township for about \$350,000 in an attempt to expand its facilities in safer surroundings. Neighbors have opposed the project, saying it will bring heavy traffic and contribute to existing flooding problems in the area. A federal judge temporarily blocked an attempt to take the property by eminent domain. **(47)**

The Harvard City Council (Michigan) in May 2005 rejected a request to open a Muslim boarding school in the northwest McHenry County town, saying it wasn't compatible with nearby residences. After about 10 minutes of discussion, the council denied the bid by the Ibrahim Education Foundation to convert an old church into a boarding school for Muslim boys. **(48)**

Plans for an Islamic community center and school south of Lodi, California came to a grinding halt in Sept. 2005 when the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors decided unanimously against a land use permit for the project. Farooqia Islamic Center supporters had filed an application at the county level nearly three years ago, though the vision for the project has been in the making for more than a decade. The project, which included a worship hall and a K-4 school, was approved by the county Planning Commission in July 2005, but was soon appealed by residents living in the agricultural area surrounding the Lower Sacramento Road property. The project had been at the county level since former Imam Mohammad Adil Khan, who lived at a house on the site, applied for a land use permit on Dec. 18, 2003. But in June 2005, the property was put under the

microscope in a terror investigation led by the FBI against several members of the Muslim community including Umar Hayat and his son Hamid Hayat. During the investigation, Khan was arrested on an immigration violation and subsequently agreed to be deported to his native Pakistan. **(49)**

Amid controversy, Islamic Society of Sarasota and Bradenton (Florida) has to change the height of the 85-foot minarets for its new \$1.5 million mosque. Originally, the mosque's leaders submitted plans to Sarasota County for a 62-foot tall building, including dome, and two 85-foot minarets. But Sarasota County ruled that the building too greatly exceeded the county's height restriction of 35 feet and approved a maximum height of 40 feet. **(50)**

There was some good news too. In some cases, the Muslims were able to get permission for their mosque projects.

Hernando (Florida) County's lone mosque received approval in May 2007 for a significant expansion. The Barclay Avenue mosque plans to expand to more than seven times its current size, creating a single-story building with space for offices, community events and 3,790 square feet of assembly space for prayer. The five-member Hernando County Planning and Zoning Commission unanimously recommended approval to revise a special use permit that will allow the expansion of the mosque. Neighbors complained about the noise and traffic from the mosque. Afterward, several criticized the commissioners for not giving them enough time to air their concerns. **(51)**

The Bridgeview Village Board (Michigan) in April 2006 approved expansion of a mosque on the village's southwest side after a group of homeowners dropped their opposition. The mosque proposal had languished for months before the village's Zoning Board of Appeals while residents and officials considered traffic and other quality-of-life issues surrounding expansion of the Mosque Foundation of Bridgeview's worship center. Earlier the Plan Commission was deadlocked 3-3 on the project. **(52)**

In June 2006, Franklin Township (New Jersey) officials approved the first official mosque in Somerset County in a ranch home that has quietly served as a house of worship for local Muslims for the past several years. "We're absolutely thrilled," said Ibrahim Conteh, one of the imams at the Da'awatu Islamia of Somerset mosque. "We've been fighting for this for quite some time." Conteh, a native of Freetown in Sierra Leone, lives in the neighborhood. **(53)**

In May 2005, the Islamic Center of America in Detroit formally opened its \$12 million complex to provide its 3,000 members with more room to worship and have community activities. The Islamic Center -- which is among the largest mosques in the country -- is a 120,000-square-foot complex that includes the mosque, the Muslim American Youth Academy, an auditorium and library. There are about 500,000 Arab-Americans in Metro Detroit. About 30,000 Dearborn residents -- about one-third of the city's population -- are of Arab descent. The Islamic Center's existing mosque in Detroit began as the Islamic Center of Detroit in 1963. Coupled with the American National Museum and Cultural Center and mosque, Dearborn will now be the country's hub of Arab American culture and religion. The Dearborn Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services also opened the \$12.8 million museum this month. **(54)**

In the pre-9/11 era, there was an extensive growth of mosques and Islamic centers that has now been arrested.