

Table of Contents

- ***US quits 'biased' UN human rights council***
- ***Seven targeted countries react to Trump's ban on immigration***
- ***US travel ban: Why these seven countries?***
- ***Dakota Access pipeline protests: UN group investigates human rights abuses***
- ***U.S. mistakenly granted citizenship to hundreds of immigrants***
- ***The tragedy of Orlando, a dramatic symptom – The disease: Islamist totalitarianism***
- ***Politicizing the Threat of Islamist Terrorism***
- ***U.S. soldiers told to ignore sexual abuse of boys by Afghan allies***
- ***Muslims, marriage and bigotry***
- ***American oubliette***
- ***Obama condemns anti-Islam video, highlights free speech***
- ***No More Apologies***
- ***A bold, unapologetic defense of free speech would help in the fight against terror.***
- ***US troops punished for Koran burning and urination video***
- ***Both Islamism and Baathism are spent forces***
- ***The implications of Bin Laden's death for America***

US quits 'biased' UN human rights council

BBC (20.06.2018) - <https://bbc.in/2tiif8o> - **The US has pulled out of the United Nations Human Rights Council, calling it a "cesspool of political bias".**

The "hypocritical and self-serving" body "makes a mockery of human rights", said US envoy to the UN Nikki Haley.

Formed in 2006, the Geneva-based council has been criticised for allowing countries with questionable human rights records to be members.

But activists said the US move could hurt efforts to monitor and address human rights abuses around the world.

Ms Haley announced her country's intention to quit the council at a joint news conference with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who called the council "a poor defender of human rights".

UN Secretary-General António Guterres, in a statement released through his spokesman, responded by saying he would have "much preferred" the US to remain in the council.

The UN human rights commissioner, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, called the US withdrawal "disappointing, if not really surprising, news". Israel, meanwhile, has praised the decision.

The move comes amid intense criticism over the Trump administration's policy of separating child migrants from their parents at the US-Mexico border.

On Monday [Mr Hussein has called the policy "unconscionable"](#).

More dismay among allies

This is just the latest rejection of multilateralism by the Trump administration, and will likely unsettle those who look to the United States to protect and promote human rights around the world.

The United States has always had a conflicting relationship with the UN Human Rights Council. The Bush Administration decided to boycott the council when it was created in 2006 for many of the same reasons cited by the Trump administration.

The then UN ambassador was John Bolton - who is currently President Trump's national security adviser and a strong critic of the UN.

It wasn't until years later, in 2009, that the United States re-joined under the Obama administration.

Many allies have tried to convince the United States to remain in the council. Even many who agree with Washington's long standing criticisms of the body believe the United States should actively work to reform it from within, rather than disengaging.

What is the UN Human Rights Council?

The UN set up the council in 2006 to replace the UN Commission on Human Rights, which faced widespread criticism for letting countries with poor human rights records become members.

A group of 47 elected countries from different global regions serve for three-year terms on the council.

The UNHRC meets three times a year, and reviews the human rights records of all UN members in a special process the council says gives countries the chance to say what they have done to improve human rights, known as [the Universal Periodic Review](#).

The council also sends out independent experts and has set up commissions of inquiry to report on human rights violations in countries including Syria, North Korea, Burundi, Myanmar and South Sudan.

Why has the US decided to quit?

The decision to leave the body follows years of US criticism.

The country initially refused to join the council in 2006, arguing that, like the old commission, the UNHRC had admitted nations with questionable human rights records.

It only joined in 2009 under President Barack Obama, and [won re-election to the council in 2012](#).

But human rights groups voiced fresh complaints about the body in 2013, after [China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Algeria and Vietnam were elected members](#).

This followed [Israel's unprecedented boycott of one of the council's reviews](#), alleging unfair criticism from the body.

Last year, [Nikki Haley told the council it was "hard to accept" that resolutions had been passed against Israel yet none had been considered for Venezuela](#), where dozens of protesters had been killed during political turmoil.

Israel is the only country that is subject to a permanent standing agenda item, meaning its treatment of the Palestinians is regularly scrutinised.

On Tuesday, despite her harsh words for the UNHRC, Ms Haley said she wanted "to make it crystal clear that this step is not a retreat from our human rights commitments".

What's been the reaction?

Some countries and diplomats were quick to express disappointment about the US withdrawal.

The UNHRC's current president, Slovenian ambassador Vojislav Suc, said the body was the only one "responding to human rights issues and situations worldwide".

After the US decision to quit, he said, "it is essential that we uphold a strong and vibrant council".

[UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said the decision was "regrettable"](#), arguing that while reforms are needed, the UNHRC is "crucial to holding states to account".

A number of charities and aid groups criticised the move, with the American Civil Liberties Union saying the Trump administration was leading a "concerted, aggressive effort to violate basic human rights".

The New York-based group Human Rights Watch condemned the US decision to leave the council and called President Trump's human rights policy "one-dimensional".

But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was quick to support the measure, posting a number of tweets praising the country's "courageous decision".

Seven targeted countries react to Trump's ban on immigration

By Bill Chappell

National Public Radio (30.01.2017) - <http://n.pr/2kMwYTn> - Surprise and a desire for retaliation are some of the reactions to President Trump's temporary ban on travelers from seven Muslim-majority countries.

The ban, abruptly imposed Friday, led the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, a 57-nation body that's based in Saudi Arabia, to call on the U.S. to "maintain its moral

obligation to provide leadership and hope at a time of great uncertainty and unrest in the world."

Expressing its "grave concern" about the policy, the group said that refugees "have been adversely and unjustly affected" — and it added that the policy also plays into the hands of extremist groups that have accused the U.S. of waging war on Muslims.

The ban on people traveling from Iraq, Iran, Syria, Yemen, Sudan, Libya and Somalia is slated to last for 90 days. In addition, new refugee admissions are suspended for 120 days and Syrian refugees are banned indefinitely.

Here's a rundown of reactions from countries that now find themselves on an undesirable U.S. list:

Iraq

"Iraqis seem shocked by the ban" imposed by one of its allies, NPR's Alice Fordham reports on today's Morning Edition.

Parliament has approved a plan for a reciprocal ban on Americans, which would need cabinet approval before taking effect, Alice says. She adds that Iraq's former ambassador to the U.S., Lukman Faily, says he's been told he can't travel to the U.S.

The ban shows "swagger and an arrogance," influential Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr says, noting that Americans are allowed to freely enter many countries — including those on its banned list.

How the order goes over in Iraq is especially important because that country's government has been a key ally to the U.S. in the war on ISIS. Iraq is also home to about 6,000 U.S. troops who are aiding domestic forces on the front line against ISIS.

Iran

State-run IRNA news agency complained of "U.S. terrorism double standards," noting that Saudi Arabia is not on Trump's list. As NPR's Greg Myre pointed out, the radicalized Muslims who carried out deadly attacks in the U.S., beginning on Sept. 11, 2001, came from these countries: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Lebanon, United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Russia and Kyrgyzstan.

None of those countries are on Trump's list.

Tehran will "take reciprocal measures" against U.S. nationals who want to travel to Iran, First Vice-President Eshaq Jahangiri promised Monday.

The Foreign Ministry calls the ban "insulting," while also saying any retaliation will be "proportionate" and will be made "while respecting the American people and differentiating between them and the hostile policies of the U.S. Government."

Syria

The country's government so far hasn't released an official response to Friday's order.

However, state-run SANA media highlighted international criticism of Trump's immigration ban and the U.S. president's low approval ratings in a new Gallup poll. SANA cited calls from the international community and American protesters for Trump to reconsider the ban.

A month ago, Syrian President Bashar Assad had praised Trump's approach to terrorism and said that the new U.S. president would be a "natural ally."

As NPR's Deb Amos noted, "More than 50 percent of Muslim refugees admitted to the U.S. last year come from Syria and Somalia."

Yemen

Attempts to "classify Yemen or its citizens as a possible source of terrorism are illegal and illegitimate," the government says. The Foreign Ministry said that while it is "aware that such action is the sovereign right for the United States, however, identifying specific countries as potential sources of terrorists ... needs more assessment and revision."

Yemen also characterized a deadly U.S. raid that was carried out Sunday as "state terrorism committed by the United States under the pretext of fighting terrorism."

That raid targeting al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula resulted in the death of a U.S. service member as well as 14 militants, officials say. But the Pentagon is looking into reports that it also killed women and children — including the 8-year-old granddaughter of Nasser al-Awlaki — a former Yemeni minister of agriculture whose son, killed by the U.S. in 2011, was an al-Qaida proselytizer.

Sudan

America's envoy in Khartoum was summoned by Sudan's Foreign Ministry to hear the country's protests against Trump's decision, which came at a time of increasing cooperation between the U.S. and Sudan.

Sudan's government has been working to be taken off the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism — just weeks ago, President Obama eased economic sanctions against the country that had stood for 20 years.

"The Sudanese citizens living in the United States are known for their good reputation, respect for American laws, and their lack of involvement in radical and criminal acts," the government says.

Somalia

The government so far doesn't appear to have issued a formal response, but Somali native Mo Farah, a decorated Olympian and British citizen who lives in Portland, Ore., criticized the ban, which he said cast doubt on whether he can return to his family after training in Ethiopia.

Farah said via Facebook: "It's deeply troubling that I will have to tell my children that Daddy might not be able to come home — to explain why the President has introduced a policy that comes from a place of ignorance and prejudice."

Hundreds of thousands of Somali refugees live in Kenya. NPR's Eyder Peralta, citing the U.N.'s refugee agency, reports that some 26,000 Somalis in Kenya are undergoing the official process of trying to gain permission to settle in the U.S. Roughly half have already been interviewed by U.S. immigration officials.

After Trump's election in November, Somalia congratulated the new president and said it hopes to strengthen relations, saying Somalia's government and people "enjoy strong bilateral ties with the USA built on mutual respect, trust and partnership."

Libya

We're not seeing an official response from the struggling nation. The ban came weeks before a conference on U.S.-Libya relations is scheduled to be held in Washington, D.C.

US travel ban: Why these seven countries?

President Donald Trump has signed an executive order that banned travel into the United States for citizens from these seven countries for 90 days: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

By Jack Goodman

BBC News (30.01.2017) - <http://bbc.in/2jUctnu> - The restrictions were part of wide ranging immigration controls that also suspended refugee arrivals. It appears that existing restrictions in place during the Obama administration informed Mr Trump's list.

These countries were already named as "countries of concern" after a law passed by a Republican-led Congress in 2015 altered a visa admissions programme.

The Visa Waiver Program allows citizens from 38 countries to enter the US for 90 days without a visa. The UK, France and Germany are among those countries allowed in under the waiver programme. Visitors apply for an Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESta).

In December 2015 Congress passed a law - created by senators from both parties, and supported and signed by the White House - that removed waiver benefits for foreign nationals who had visited certain countries since March 2011. The countries were identified as having a terrorist organisation with a significant presence in the area, or the country was deemed a "safe haven" for terrorists.

After Libya, Somalia and Yemen were added to the list in February 2016, the "countries of concern" were the seven named in Mr Trump's order.

According to the restrictions, citizens who had been eligible for the waiver programme and had visited one of those seven countries in the time period were forced to apply for a visa.

The Obama administration passed the Visa Waiver Program Improvement and Terrorist Travel Prevention Act of 2015 after the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris. The Act, however, unlike Trump's much more broad order, only affected people eligible for the visa waiver programme, rather than suspend all citizens' travel from one of those seven countries.

In a statement on 29 January, President Trump said his policy was "similar" to an Obama order that "banned visa for refugees from Iraq".

Trump referred to an incident in May 2011 when the FBI indicted two Iraqi citizens in Kentucky on federal terrorism charges. Both were accused of providing material support to al-Qaeda and had been involved in attacks against US forces in Iraq.

A hearing before the Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence found that the pair had "exploited special Iraqi refugee programs". The vetting system came under review and this resulted in fewer Iraqi refugee admissions that year.

The number of refugees from Iraq dropped from 18,016 to 9,388 as a result of the suspension. That number increased to 12,163 the following year.

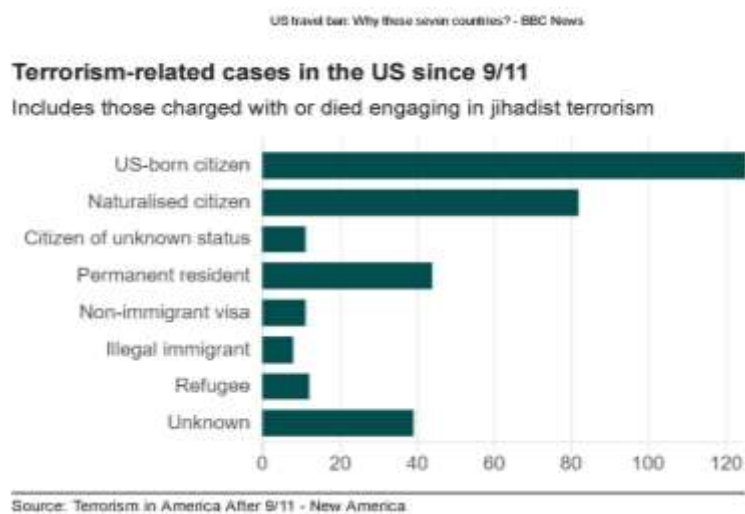
Do citizens from the seven countries pose the biggest threats?

Mr Trump's order said that foreign-born individuals have been responsible for "numerous" terrorism-related crimes since 9/11, including foreign nationals who have entered the country on visa or refugee programmes. The 9/11 attackers came from Saudi Arabia, UAE, Lebanon and Egypt.

In September 2015 the Homeland Security Committee reported that the so-called Islamic State had inspired or directed 60 terror plots or attacks in Western countries, including 15 in the United States. There are 250 American citizens known to have joined Islamist extremist groups.

Terrorism-related cases in the US since 9/11

Includes those charged with or died engaging in jihadist terrorism



Significant recent attacks in the US were not committed by citizens from any of the seven countries included in the order. This list includes:

- Fort Lauderdale airport shooting (January 2017): A US citizen
- Orlando nightclub shooting (June 2016): A US citizen with Afghan parents
- San Bernardino shooting (December 2015): A US citizen with Pakistani parents, and a Pakistani citizen
- Chattanooga shootings (July 2015): A Kuwait-born US citizen
- Charleston church shooting (June 2015): A US citizen
- Boston marathon bombing (April 2013): Two men originally from Chechnya, Russia

There have been a few non-fatal attacks by individuals from two of the countries on the banned list.

According to the New America Foundation, 82% of all terrorism incidents since 2001 were conducted by citizens and permanent residents. Since 9/11, jihadists have killed 94 people inside the United States.

A Cato Institute study found that Americans are 253 times more likely to die in a regular homicide than dying in a terrorist attack committed by a foreigner in the US.

US Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Lindsey Graham (R-SC) have said the order "may do more to help terrorist recruitment than improve our security", because of the signal it sends to the Muslim world.

But President Trump has rejected that notion, saying in an interview that America's enemies were already angry and it was his number one responsibility to keep the country safe. And his supporters wholeheartedly agree.

"Donald Trump says this is temporary and I trust him," said one resident in New York's Staten Island. "His number one job is to protect the American people."

Dakota Access pipeline protests: UN group investigates human rights abuses

Native American protesters have reported excessive force, unlawful arrests and mistreatment in jail where activists describe being held in cages

By Sam Levin

The Guardian (31.10.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2fAt7dD> - A United Nations group is investigating allegations of human rights abuses by North Dakota law enforcement against Native American protesters, with indigenous leaders testifying about "acts of war" they observed during mass arrests at an oil pipeline protest.

A representative of the UN's permanent forum on indigenous issues, an advisory group, has been collecting testimony from Dakota Access pipeline protesters who have raised concerns about excessive force, unlawful arrests and mistreatment in jail where some activists have been held in cages.

"When you look at what the international standards are for the treatment of people, and you are in a place like the United States, it's really astounding to hear some of this testimony," said Roberto Borrero, a representative of the International Indian Treaty Council.

Borrero, a Taino tribe member who is assisting the UN forum in its interviews, told the Guardian on Sunday night that the activists' stories of human rights violations raised a number of serious questions about police response. "A lot of it was just very shocking."

The pipeline protests have become increasingly intense over the last two weeks as construction has moved closer to the Missouri river and as police have aggressively responded to activists' demonstrations with arrests, pepper spray, riot gear and army tanks.

The Standing Rock camps first emerged in April and have since drawn thousands of Native Americans and climate change activists from across North America and beyond to rally against the \$3.7bn oil pipeline, which would carry crude oil from the Bakken oil field to a refinery near Chicago.

The tribal leadership's attempts to block construction in court have been unsuccessful, and the pipeline operator, Texas-based Energy Transfer Partners, has moved forward at a rapid pace, building on lands that indigenous leaders say contain sacred burial grounds.

Despite the 22 October arrests of more than 120 people, activists set up new camps on the sites where construction is planned, not far from the river that they fear could be contaminated by the pipeline.

The Morton County sheriff's office responded on 27 October by surrounding the protesters and arresting 141 people.

Officials have accused activists and journalists of a range of charges, including criminal trespassing, rioting, and a number of serious felonies. Law enforcement have also set up strictly enforced traffic blockades protecting the pipeline site from protesters and the general public.

Native Americans recently released from jail, including elderly women and young activists, have since shared stories with the Guardian of the treatment they faced behind bars, which they said was cruel and inhumane.

Jailed protesters said it seemed clear that police weren't prepared to handle hundreds of people at once in their local correctional facilities. A day after their release, many still had numbers and charges written on their arms in marker – which advocates said was an unusual and dehumanizing way for police to track inmates – and some were temporarily kept in cages that they said felt like “dog kennels”.

On Monday, Borrero and Grand Chief Edward John, a Native American member of the UN permanent forum, met with police officials in the local town of Mandan and visited the controversial cages.

The Guardian was planning to join the UN on the visit, and a police spokesman initially told a reporter, “We have nothing to hide.”

But sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier, the controversial law enforcement official leading the response to the protests, later refused to let the media in, saying allegations of poor treatment were “not true”, before shutting a door on a reporter.

Another official with the sheriff's office also appeared to be hostile toward the UN representatives when they arrived. In the presence of a Guardian videographer, that police official told Borrero and John it seemed as if they weren't neutral and had already made up their minds that police had mistreated protesters.

A spokeswoman later sent photos of the holding cells, adding in an email that the “temporary fenced cubicles” were “at least” 10 by 14ft. The images show a windowless room with a number of parallel cages with ceilings of fencing.

The spokeswoman also claimed that while in the cells, the inmates have access to bathrooms, food, water and medical attention.

But several arrested protesters said they had to wait for basic necessities.

Johanna Holy Elk Face, a 63-year-old woman arrested last week, told the Guardian that she is diabetic and had very high blood sugar while behind bars. Police were slow to respond to her request for help, she said.

“I was scared,” she said, adding that she was worried she was going to have a seizure.

Phyllis Young, a member of Standing Rock Sioux tribe, also provided testimony to the UN representatives on Sunday inside a small tent that shook as strong winds blew outside.

Young said she intended to help the tribe file a lawsuit against North Dakota law enforcement, saying the police's violent acts against native people were "not only conditions of colonialism, but conditions of war".

"We embarked upon a peaceful and prayerful campaign," she said. "They were placed in cages. They had numbers written on their arms very much like concentration camps."

The UN forum, which has previously urged the US to allow the Sioux tribe to have a say in the pipeline project, plans to issue a report and possible recommendations after its inquiry is complete.

Kandi Mossett, a 37-year-old protester and member of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara nation, got emotional while standing in the rain recounting the mass arrests last week.

"The government is allowing the police force to be used as a military force to protect an oil company," she said.

Mossett said she would like to see the sheriff investigated and major reforms instituted in the department to stop the violent response to peaceful demonstrators.

"This started out as defending water, but now it's so much more."

Young said she was particularly disturbed to hear police talk of shielding pipeline property from activists, considering the long history of abuse against Native Americans in North Dakota and across the US.

"When they tell us we should protect property, they need to eat their words. Who is the thief here?"

U.S. mistakenly granted citizenship to hundreds of immigrants

Politico (19.09.2016) - <http://politi.co/2cWJoWG> - At least 858 people who had previously been ordered to be deported or removed from the U.S. were instead granted citizenship, the Department of Homeland Security's inspector general announced Monday.

The mistaken citizenships were granted, the Department of Homeland Security explained in a press release, because neither its digital fingerprint repository nor the FBI's fingerprint repository contain exhaustive records of individuals who have previously been deported.

The discovery was made by the Department of Homeland Security's office of inspector general, which released a report Monday on the incomplete fingerprint records and the mistakenly granted citizenships. The Department of Homeland Security's records are incomplete, the release said, because paper fingerprint cards used before 2008 were not consistently digitized. The FBI's records are incomplete because fingerprints collected during immigration enforcement activities were not always shared with the bureau.

The inspector general's report specified that those granted citizenship were only "potentially" ineligible and were not necessarily granted citizenship incorrectly. A statement from the Department of Homeland Security said that the department is taking steps to correct the issues that led to the incomplete fingerprint records and that not all applicants whose records were incomplete wound up being granted citizenship.

"It is important to note that the fact that fingerprint records in these cases may have been incomplete at the time of the naturalization interview does not necessarily mean that the applicant was in fact granted naturalization, or that the applicant obtained naturalization fraudulently. Preliminary results from the file reviews show that in a significant number of these cases naturalization had been denied and that, in some, naturalization was not improperly granted," department spokesman Neema Hakim said in the statement. "Other cases are subject to ongoing criminal investigation or to denaturalization proceedings that are pending or completed."

In at least three cases, the inspector general's office discovered previously-deported individuals who were granted citizenship and then obtained clearance for "security-sensitive work at commercial airports or maritime facilities and vessels." The release said all three have since had their security credentials revoked.

"This situation created opportunities for individuals to gain the rights and privileges of U.S. citizenship through fraud," Inspector General John Roth said. "To prevent fraud and ensure thorough review of naturalization applications, [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services] needs access to these fingerprint records."

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has made the vetting of immigrants as they enter the U.S. a major part of his presidential platform, suggesting during the GOP primary that America temporarily ban all Muslims from entering the U.S. until a more stringent vetting process could be put in place. He has since backed away from that proposal, which drew widespread criticism from both parties, in favor of a ban on immigration from "any nation that has been compromised by terrorism."

The tragedy of Orlando, a dramatic symptom – The disease: Islamist totalitarianism

Beyond the gay issue

By Willy Fautré, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (16.06.2016) - The massacre at Orlando is not the isolated act of an insane person or of a lone wolf. It was claimed by the perpetrator as an ISIS - legitimized operation and it was endorsed by ISIS. The ISIS has not been known to lie in its endorsements of terrorist attacks.

ISIS 'fatwas'

The origin of gunman Omar Mateen cannot be downplayed and could also explain his vulnerability to some discourses: an American citizen born in the US but of Muslim culture from the origin of his Afghan family. It cannot be ignored either that the 'fatwas' launched by ISIS leaders incite Muslims around the world to attack emblematic and symbolic targets of Western values and ways of life. The targets of the Paris terrorist attacks in January and November 2015 are the best illustration of ISIS policy. Music, dance, sports, leisure, humor, freedom of expression ... all represent affronts to the beliefs of the ISIS and other similar terrorist groups, and challenges to the fundamentalist regimes they want to impose on the societies under their control, and those they aspire to controlling.

A posteriori, ISIS has legitimized terrorist attempts as acts of war, which means that their perpetrators are relieved of the liability and the burden of guilt. They fight and/or die for a good cause, sacrificing their lives to cleanse the world from vice and evil while purifying it with Muslim values. The analogy with Nazism cannot be denied.

ISIS, the flagship of Islamist totalitarianism

The tragedy in Orlando is just the tip of an iceberg. Below the surface is a barbaric ideology - Islamist totalitarianism - that permeates various cultures in the Muslim world and the individual consciences of a significant proportion of Muslims around the world. ISIS has killed a number of homosexuals in the most horrible ways in the Middle East, throwing some of them from the top of high buildings. But ISIS is just the extreme form of an ideology in which the violent repression of homosexuality (punished by the death penalty and assaults on physical integrity) has been legitimized by some political regimes in Muslim majority countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iran.

Life under jihadist rule

The way of life that Islamist totalitarianism wants to impose first on Muslim majority countries is wonderfully described in *Timbuktu*, a 2014 French-Mauritanian drama film selected to compete for the Palme d'Or at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival. At Cannes, it won the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury and the François Chalais Prize. It also won the Best Film award at the 11th Africa Movie Academy Awards.

The film looks at the brief occupation of Timbuktu, Mali, by a jihadist group. Parts of the film were influenced by a 2012 public stoning of an unmarried couple in Aguelhok.

Throughout the film there are scenes showing the reaction of the population to the jihadists' rule, which is portrayed as absurd. A female fishmonger must wear gloves even when selling fish. Music is banned; a woman is sentenced to 40 lashes for singing, and 40 lashes for being in the same room as a man not of her family. A couple are buried up to their necks in sand and stoned to death for adultery. Young men play football with an imaginary ball as sports are banned. A local imam tries to curb the jihadists' excesses with sermons. The failure of the occupiers to live up to their own rules is hinted at when one of them is seen smoking a cigarette. Another group of jihadists from France spend their days talking about their favorite football teams.

Conclusion

For the sake of democracy, the rule of law and human rights, Islamist totalitarianism must be combated with determination as other political totalitarian ideologies such as fascism, neo-nazism or communism have been and are still fought against with democratic means.

Various symptoms of this disease will go on erupting in various forms in our societies. Preventative and reactive treatments have their limits. While it is important to invest human and financial resources in the security of public places and large gatherings in the short term, more human and financial resources must be invested and prioritized in the medium- and long-term fight against the disease itself: Islamist totalitarianism.

Politicizing the Threat of Islamist Terrorism

By Aaron Rhodes, for *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (16.06.2016) - Americans are chewing each other apart following the massacre of 49 people at a gay bar in Orlando, Florida. The tragedy is being ruthlessly exploited to promote a range of partisan and social agendas.

Many are blaming the event on the availability of "assault weapons," such the gun used in the slaughter. "Semi-automatic" weapons, which many confuse with machineguns,

are thought to be the cause of mass murder. But a .45 caliber automatic pistol is also a semi-automatic gun, as are some shotguns used for hunting. The *New York Daily News* blamed the attack on the National Rifle Association. Defending constitutional gun rights has become emblematic of an entire political outlook.

The *New York Times* editorialized that the gay victims were "casualties of a society where hate has deep roots," while others blamed conservative Christians for fomenting an anti-gay atmosphere, and have associated the event with opposition to transgender toilets.

Conservatives have blamed immigration policies, weak leadership and political correctness promoted by left-wing Democrats.

President Obama said that "hate" was to blame, argued with his political critics, and again avoided linking the crime to Islamist ideology.

Especially since 9/11, when almost 3000 Americans died at the hands of Islamist terrorists, commentators, both professional and amateur, have promoted various constructions of the "root causes" of terrorism.

A common theme is that Islamist terrorism is rooted in interventions by Western powers in the Middle East, and the policies of Israel. The implication is that only by righting the wrongs done to these societies will we stop the terrorism originating there. The argument suggests that terrorism is a natural, and even justified response to the errors and failings of Western policies.

Many similar explanations reduce terrorism to economic injustice and exploitation. These explanations hold little water from a logical point of view, but they show how monolithic, reductionist approaches to explaining terrorism have become pervasive, and how they are intrinsically political. Political orientations have taken over, and distorted, our understanding of terrorism.

Our educational programs, and our way of thinking about human motivation, is infused with reductionism and a mechanistic model of the human being that resembles what a computer programming instructor once taught me: "garbage in, garbage out." The common, pseudo-scientific understanding of how social life and experiences shape human behavior reflects the influence of such figures as French sociologist Emile Durkheim and of course Karl Marx. We seek to explain human actions by the actions of society upon humans.

It follows that if the "root cause" of terrorism could be determined, then we could stop terrorism by changing what caused it. Reactions to terrorism thus reflect a belief in social engineering—that by the actions of the state, or the international community, or of civil society, we can reduce or end terrorism.

There is little doubt that things can be done to reduce terrorism. But understanding both opportunities and limitations depends on an appreciation of the infinitely mysterious and complex nature of the human personality and soul, and an appreciation of individual moral accountability and the importance of ideas.

Humans differ from animals in the capacity for reason and moral choice, in our moral agency. We have freedom. Even in the most extreme circumstances, we can resist the influence of those circumstances and make choices that are both rational and ethical. Not all who are so unfortunate as to be exposed and vulnerable to Islamist propaganda become terrorists. We, and we alone, are responsible for our choices. We have no right to blame others, or society, for our errors, any more than we should give them credit for our moral victories.

We in liberal democracies contrast our way of life, our freedoms, with oppressive societies and with ideologies, like Islamism and fascism, which denigrate individual freedom. But our free societies are undermined when we embrace dehumanizing reductionist, collectivist and mechanistic models of what drives individual choices and behavior—indeed, when we politicize explanations of terrorism.

The confrontation with Islamism is a confrontation about ideas and moral principles. Protecting ourselves from Islamism or any other totalitarian ideology won't come by misunderstanding the power of moral choice or restricting our freedoms, but when we better understand, appreciate, and promote them. It will require us fearlessly to contrast the core principles of liberal democracy with Islamism, and thus to show a free society's benefits as a form of social and political community where differences are tolerated and where individuals may live free of suffocating and dangerous ideologies.

Aaron Rhodes is President of the Forum for Religious Freedom-Europe, and a founder of the Freedom Rights Project. He was Executive Director of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights between 1993-2007.

U.S. soldiers told to ignore sexual abuse of boys by Afghan allies

NY Times (20.09.2015) - http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/21/world/asia/us-soldiers-told-to-ignore-afghan-allies-abuse-of-boys.html?_r=1 - In his last phone call home, Lance Cpl. Gregory Buckley Jr. told his father what was troubling him: From his bunk in southern Afghanistan, he could hear Afghan police officers sexually abusing boys they had brought to the base.

"At night we can hear them screaming, but we're not allowed to do anything about it," the Marine's father, Gregory Buckley Sr., recalled his son telling him before he was shot to death at the base in 2012. He urged his son to tell his superiors. "My son said that his officers told him to look the other way because it's their culture."

Rampant sexual abuse of children has long been a problem in Afghanistan, particularly among armed commanders who dominate much of the rural landscape and can bully the population. The practice is called *bacha bazi*, literally "boy play," and American soldiers and Marines have been instructed not to intervene — in some cases, not even when their Afghan allies have abused boys on military bases, according to interviews and court records.

The policy has endured as American forces have recruited and organized Afghan militias to help hold territory against the Taliban. But soldiers and Marines have been increasingly troubled that instead of weeding out pedophiles, the American military was arming them in some cases and placing them as the commanders of villages — and doing little when they began abusing children.

"The reason we were here is because we heard the terrible things the Taliban were doing to people, how they were taking away human rights," said Dan Quinn, a former Special Forces captain who beat up an American-backed militia commander for keeping a boy chained to his bed as a sex slave. "But we were putting people into power who would do things that were worse than the Taliban did — that was something village elders voiced to me."

The policy of instructing soldiers to ignore child sexual abuse by their Afghan allies is coming under new scrutiny, particularly as it emerges that service members like Captain Quinn have faced discipline, even career ruin, for disobeying it.

After the beating, the Army relieved Captain Quinn of his command and pulled him from Afghanistan. He has since left the military.

Four years later, the Army is also trying to forcibly retire Sgt. First Class Charles Martland, a Special Forces member who joined Captain Quinn in beating up the commander.

"The Army contends that Martland and others should have looked the other way (a contention that I believe is nonsense)," Representative Duncan Hunter, a California Republican who hopes to save Sergeant Martland's career, wrote last week to the Pentagon's inspector general.

In Sergeant Martland's case, the Army said it could not comment because of the Privacy Act.

When asked about American military policy, the spokesman for the American command in Afghanistan, Col. Brian Tribus, wrote in an email: "Generally, allegations of child sexual abuse by Afghan military or police personnel would be a matter of domestic Afghan criminal law." He added that "there would be no express requirement that U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan report it." An exception, he said, is when rape is being used as a weapon of war.

The American policy of nonintervention is intended to maintain good relations with the Afghan police and militia units the United States has trained to fight the Taliban. It also reflects a reluctance to impose cultural values in a country where pederasty is rife, particularly among powerful men, for whom being surrounded by young teenagers can be a mark of social status.

Some soldiers believed that the policy made sense, even if they were personally distressed at the sexual predation they witnessed or heard about.

"The bigger picture was fighting the Taliban," a former Marine lance corporal reflected. "It wasn't to stop molestation."

Still, the former lance corporal, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to avoid offending fellow Marines, recalled feeling sickened the day he entered a room on a base and saw three or four men lying on the floor with children between them. "I'm not a hundred percent sure what was happening under the sheet, but I have a pretty good idea of what was going on," he said.

But the American policy of treating child sexual abuse as a cultural issue has often alienated the villages whose children are being preyed upon. The pitfalls of the policy emerged clearly as American Special Forces soldiers began to form Afghan Local Police militias to hold villages that American forces had retaken from the Taliban in 2010 and 2011.

By the summer of 2011, Captain Quinn and Sergeant Martland, both Green Berets on their second tour in northern Kunduz Province, began to receive dire complaints about the Afghan Local Police units they were training and supporting.

First, they were told, one of the militia commanders raped a 14- or 15-year-old girl whom he had spotted working in the fields. Captain Quinn informed the provincial police chief, who soon levied punishment. "He got one day in jail, and then she was forced to marry him," Mr. Quinn said.

When he asked a superior officer what more he could do, he was told that he had done well to bring it up with local officials but that there was nothing else to be done. "We're being praised for doing the right thing, and a guy just got away with raping a 14-year-old girl," Mr. Quinn said.

illage elders grew more upset at the predatory behavior of American-backed commanders. After each case, Captain Quinn would gather the Afghan commanders and lecture them on human rights.

Soon another commander absconded with his men's wages. Mr. Quinn said he later heard that the commander had spent the money on dancing boys. Another commander murdered his 12-year-old daughter in a so-called honor killing for having kissed a boy. "There were no repercussions," Mr. Quinn recalled.

In September 2011, an Afghan woman, visibly bruised, showed up at an American base with her son, who was limping. One of the Afghan police commanders in the area, Abdul Rahman, had abducted the boy and forced him to become a sex slave, chained to his bed, the woman explained. When she sought her son's return, she herself was beaten. Her son had eventually been released, but she was afraid it would happen again, she told the Americans on the base.

She explained that because "her son was such a good-looking kid, he was a status symbol" coveted by local commanders, recalled Mr. Quinn, who did not speak to the woman directly but was told about her visit when he returned to the base from a mission later that day.

So Captain Quinn summoned Abdul Rahman and confronted him about what he had done. The police commander acknowledged that it was true, but brushed it off. When the American officer began to lecture about "how you are held to a higher standard if you are working with U.S. forces, and people expect more of you," the commander began to laugh.

"I picked him up and threw him onto the ground," Mr. Quinn said. Sergeant Martland joined in, he said. "I did this to make sure the message was understood that if he went back to the boy, that it was not going to be tolerated," Mr. Quinn recalled.

There is disagreement over the extent of the commander's injuries. Mr. Quinn said they were not serious, which was corroborated by an Afghan official who saw the commander afterward.

(The commander, Abdul Rahman, was killed two years ago in a Taliban ambush. His brother said in an interview that his brother had never raped the boy, but was the victim of a false accusation engineered by his enemies.)

Sergeant Martland, who received a Bronze Star for valor for his actions during a Taliban ambush, wrote in a letter to the Army this year that he and Mr. Quinn "felt that morally we could no longer stand by and allow our A.L.P. to commit atrocities," referring to the Afghan Local Police.

The father of Lance Corporal Buckley believes the policy of looking away from sexual abuse was a factor in his son's death, and he has filed a lawsuit to press the Marine Corps for more information about it.

Lance Corporal Buckley and two other Marines were killed in 2012 by one of a large entourage of boys living at their base with an Afghan police commander named Sarwar Jan.

Mr. Jan had long had a bad reputation; in 2010, two Marine officers managed to persuade the Afghan authorities to arrest him following a litany of abuses, including corruption, support for the Taliban and child abduction. But just two years later, the police commander was back with a different unit, working at Lance Corporal Buckley's post, Forward Operating Base Delhi, in Helmand Province.

Lance Corporal Buckley had noticed that a large entourage of "tea boys" — domestic servants who are sometimes pressed into sexual slavery — had arrived with Mr. Jan and moved into the same barracks, one floor below the Marines. He told his father about it during his final call home.

Word of Mr. Jan's new position also reached the Marine officers who had gotten him arrested in 2010. One of them, Maj. Jason Brezler, dashed out an email to Marine officers at F.O.B. Delhi, warning them about Mr. Jan and attaching a dossier about him.

The warning was never heeded. About two weeks later, one of the older boys with Mr. Jan — around 17 years old — grabbed a rifle and killed Lance Corporal Buckley and the other Marines.

Lance Corporal Buckley's father still agonizes about whether the killing occurred because of the sexual abuse by an American ally. "As far as the young boys are concerned, the Marines are allowing it to happen and so they're guilty by association," Mr. Buckley said. "They don't know our Marines are sick to their stomachs."

The one American service member who was punished in the investigation that followed was Major Brezler, who had sent the email warning about Mr. Jan, his lawyers said. In one of Major Brezler's hearings, Marine Corps lawyers warned that information about the police commander's penchant for abusing boys might be classified. The Marine Corps has initiated proceedings to discharge Major Brezler.

Mr. Jan appears to have moved on, to a higher-ranking police command in the same province. In an interview, he denied keeping boys as sex slaves or having any relationship with the boy who killed the three Marines. "No, it's all untrue," Mr. Jan said. But people who know him say he still suffers from "a toothache problem," a euphemism here for child sexual abuse.

Muslims, marriage and bigotry

New York Times (12.02.2015) <http://mobile.nytimes.com/2015/02/12/opinion/nicholas-kristof-muslims-marriage-and-bigotry.html?referrer=&r=0> - In North Carolina, [three young Muslims](#) who were active in charity work were murdered, allegedly by a man who identified as atheist and expressed hostility to Islam and other faiths. [Police are exploring whether it was a hate crime](#), and [it spurred](#) a #MuslimLivesMatter campaign on Twitter.

And, in Alabama, [we see judges refusing to approve marriages of any kind](#) because then [they would also have to approve](#) same-sex marriages. In [one poll conducted last year](#), some 59 percent of people in Alabama opposed gay marriage. Somehow a loving God is cited to bar loving couples from committing to each other.

These are very different news stories. But I wonder if a common lesson from both may be the importance of resisting bigotry, of combating the intolerance that can infect people of any faith — or of no faith.

[I don't think Muslims should feel obliged](#) to apologize for the Charlie Hebdo terror attacks. Nor do I think atheists need apologize for the killing of the three Muslims.

But it does seem useful for everyone to reflect on our capacity to “otherize” people of a different faith, race, nationality or sexuality — and to turn that other-ness into a threat. That’s what the Islamic State does to us. And sometimes that’s what we do, too.

O.K. I’m sure some of you are protesting: *That’s a false equivalency.* True, there is a huge difference between burning someone alive and not granting a couple a marriage license. But, then again, it’s not much of a slogan to say, “We’re better than ISIS!”

There has been a pugnacious defensiveness among conservative Christians to any parallels between Christian overreach and Islamic overreach, as seen in the outraged reaction to [President Obama’s acknowledgment at the National Prayer Breakfast](#) this month that the West has plenty to regret as well. But Obama was exactly right: How can we ask Islamic leaders to confront extremism in their faith if we don’t acknowledge Christian extremism, from the Crusades to Srebrenica?

More broadly, one message of the New Testament is the value of focusing on one’s own mistakes rather than those of others. “You hypocrite,” [Jesus says in Matthew 7:5](#). “First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

We could do with a little more of that spirit these days, at a time when everybody wants to practice ophthalmology on everyone else.

When I posted [on my Facebook page](#) about the North Carolina murders, one follower, Frank, wrote dismissively: “Muslims are slaughtering people around the globe (including their own) but let’s highlight this story — seems legit.”

I’ve previously urged Muslims to reflect on intolerance in their camp, and this is an occasion when Christians, atheists and others can do the same. Did the furor in North Carolina that led to [the cancellation of the Muslim call to prayer from Duke University’s chapel tower](#) inflame sentiments?

The Alabama legal drama, with Chief Justice Roy S. Moore of the State Supreme Court [defying federal authorities](#), is, of course, different. But it also is redolent of faith as I-am-holier-than-thou chest-thumping, a reminder of the need for humility.

Do Judge Moore and other conservative Christians think that when God made gays and lesbians fall achingly in love with each other, He screwed up?

It seems odd to me that so many conservative Christians are obsessed with homosexuality, which Jesus never mentions, yet seem unworried about issues Jesus did emphasize like poverty and suffering. Jesus explicitly advised a wealthy man, “Go, sell your possessions and give to the poor” ([Matthew 19:21](#)), so maybe that’s the Scripture that Judge Moore should follow to demonstrate his piety.

Then there’s Jesus’s praise for those who make themselves eunuchs ([Matthew 19:12](#)); but I’d settle for a little “love thy neighbor as thyself.”

[I’ve written often about committed and self-effacing Christians doing outstanding work combating injustice around the world](#), and [it’s frustrating that they don’t get attention](#). The problem is that their heroism is often overshadowed by sanctimonious blowhards.

Among Americans aged 18 to 24, [a 2012 survey found](#) that half or more describe present-day Christianity as “hypocritical,” “judgmental” and “anti-gay.” And more

regarded it as immoral to view pornography than to have sex with a person of the same gender. Alabama is, once again, on the wrong side of history.

Pope Francis has been a breath of fresh air to Catholics and non-Catholics alike because he seems less moralizing and more moral, less about pointing a finger and more about offering a helping hand. After the tragedy in North Carolina and the legal chaos in Alabama, maybe that's a good instinct for all of us.

American oubliette

Life without parole is an outrageous sentence for non-violent criminals

Economist (16.11.2013) - TIMOTHY JACKSON stole a jacket from a shop in New Orleans in 1996. When followed by a detective, he dropped it and tried to walk away. He was caught, convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment with no chance of parole. "I'm locked up like I killed someone," he told the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*. Actually, his punishment is harsher than that. Even Charles Manson, a multiple murderer, is allowed to apply for parole. Mr Manson is unlikely ever to get it, but at least he receives a hearing. Mr Jackson, a petty thief, does not.

His punishment is harsh because he is a recidivist in a state with mandatory tough sentences for habitual criminals. Under Louisiana's "four-strikes" law, his two previous convictions for stealing from cars and one juvenile conviction for robbery gave the judge no choice but to throw away the key.

Forget them not

No one knows how many non-violent criminals are serving life without parole in America, but the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has counted 3,278 in the federal system and the states that release statistics (see [article](#)). The true number is probably higher. And this does not include prisoners serving sentences that, while not technically "life without parole", are so long that it makes little difference, such as Bernie Madoff's 150-year penalty for a massive financial fraud.

Some criminals should be locked up for ever. It would be absurdly risky to release a murderer like Mr Manson, who shows no remorse and still describes himself as dangerous. For those who oppose the death penalty (as *The Economist* does), "whole life" sentences are a useful alternative. Many voters want murderers to be executed to make sure they never kill again; support for capital punishment weakens when the option of permanent incarceration is available.

But there is no way to justify oubliettes for shoplifters. Judges who are allowed to use their discretion hardly ever condemn non-violent criminals to life without parole. In the ACLU's sample, 83% of such sentences were the result of mandatory-sentencing laws. Most (79%) were for drug offences. Some of the criminals involved were kingpins, but others were low-level couriers or clueless addicts caught up in big drug busts. (Key members of a drug gang can often trade information for lighter sentences; peripheral figures typically know too little to do the same.) The drug crimes that trigger life without parole can be as trivial as owning a crack pipe or a bottle cap with a trace of heroin on it. The non-drug crimes can be just as ludicrous: trying to cash a stolen cheque; siphoning petrol from a truck; threatening a cop while handcuffed.

The inmates of the American oubliette are typically poor and none too bright. Many had bad lawyers. Most are black. Those who receive life without parole for non-violent crimes are even more likely to be black than prisoners in general: 65% of the national total and 91% of those in Louisiana, estimates the ACLU. But the problem with the system is not racial bias; applying such draconian, hope-crushing sentences to non-violent offenders of any race is cruel and pointless.

The main purpose of prison is to reduce crime, by keeping criminals off the streets and deterring others from following their example. It makes sense to lock violent offenders away, especially while they are young, fit and impulsive, and to treat habitual criminals more severely than novices. But keeping petty thieves in cells until they die of old age yields negligible benefits at ruinous expense. A year behind bars can cost more than tuition at Harvard; the human cost is unknowable.

In August Eric Holder, Barack Obama's attorney-general, admitted that America locks up too many people for far too long: with a twentieth of the world's population, it has a quarter of its prisoners. Mr Holder promised to tell federal prosecutors to seek shorter sentences for non-violent offenders with no ties to organised crime. That was a good start, but no more.

Congress and state legislatures should scrap mandatory sentencing and let judges judge. America should favour shorter sentences coupled with greater efforts to rehabilitate wrongdoers—electronic ankle tags are cheaper and kinder than incarceration. Ideally, more states would join the 20 that have decriminalised marijuana, as a step towards treating addicts instead of punishing them. At the very least, Mr Obama and the state governors should use their clemency powers to reduce the sentences of those now locked up for ever for non-violent crimes. Mr Jackson's sister told the ACLU: "It's like he don't even exist no more." But he does, and his punishment disgraces every American official who has colluded in it.

Obama condemns anti-Islam video, highlights free speech

Deutsche Welle (25.09.2012) - US President Barack Obama has slammed an anti-Islam video but said that it did not justify the recent Middle East violence. Addressing the UN General Assembly, Obama called for free speech rebuttals rather than censure.

Obama described the video, allegedly produced by Coptic Christian extremists in California, as "an insult not only to Muslims, but to America as well."

It was "crude and disgusting," Obama said, but added that in an age of Internet and uncontrollable information, the answer lies in embracing free speech.

"Here in the United States, countless publications provoke offense," Obama said. "Like me, the majority of Americans are Christian, and yet we do not ban blasphemy against our most sacred beliefs."

"We do so not because we support hateful speech, but because our founders understood that without such protections, the capacity of each individual to express their own views, and practice their own faith, may be threatened," Obama said.

Slain ambassador held up as example

Obama eulogized the Arabic-speaking Ambassador Chris Stevens, murdered in Libya two weeks ago, saying that the US would be "relentless in tracking down the killers and bringing them to justice."

"Chris Stevens' legacy will live on in the lives he touched," Obama said, "in the tens of thousands who marched against violence through the streets of Benghazi, in the Libyans who changed their Facebook photo to one of Chris, in the sign that read simply, 'Chris Stevens was a friend to all Libyans.'"

"True democracy - real freedom - is hard work," Obama added.

On September 11, four Americans, including Stevens, were killed in Libya, and, over the past two weeks, more than 50 others have died in violence directed at US and European embassies around the world.

No More Apologies

A bold, unapologetic defense of free speech would help in the fight against terror.

National Review Online (21.09.2012) - How should a liberal democracy react to violent outrage over private citizens' purported denigration of Islam? That question has preoccupied Western governments since Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa calling for the killing of Salman Rushdie, the British author of *The Satanic Verses*, in 1989. The Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten's* publication of cartoons depicting Mohammed in 2005 reignited the issue, and the recent anti-American riots in Muslim-majority countries are but the latest example of this recurring phenomenon.

In general, the responses from Western governments have combined condemnations of violence with expressions of sympathy for Muslims and understanding of their sensitivity. In many cases, governments have distanced themselves from, or outright condemned, those who have crossed the invisible lines that spark protests by people who often have not read or seen the putatively offensive material. And while Western governments always condemn violence as indefensible, they nonetheless frequently blame those who have offended alongside the perpetrators of violence. When Western governments invoke freedom of expression, it is sometimes mentioned hesitantly, almost as a peculiar and regrettable feature of liberal democracy that ties the hands of otherwise sympathetic officials.

The Obama administration explicitly blamed the crude amateur film *The Innocence of Muslims* for sparking the riots and embassy attacks. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton condemned the film as "disgusting and reprehensible" and decried the denigration of religion. U.N. ambassador Susan Rice explicitly linked *The Satanic Verses*, the Mohammed cartoons, and *The Innocence of Muslims*, claiming that they had "sparked outrage and anger, and this has been the proximate cause of what we've seen last week." The White House admitted to pressuring Google (which owns YouTube) to remove the film from the Internet.

Let's look back to 1989 and the Rushdie affair. While Britain's Conservative government expelled all Iranian diplomats following the fatwa against Rushdie and protected his physical safety, it felt no need to defend his right to free speech, as detailed by British author Kenan Malik in his 2009 book [From Fatwa to Jihad](#). Prime Minister Margaret

Thatcher stated that "we have known in our own religion people doing things which are deeply offensive to some of us. . . . We feel it very much. And that is what has happened to Islam." As pressure mounted on the British government, Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe expressed "deep sympathy with the Muslims over the publication of the book" and "promised to explore the possibility of taking necessary steps under British law to resolve the problem created by the publication of the book."

Much criticism has been leveled at the apologetic tone of the press release condemning "abuse of freedom of expression" that the U.S. embassy in Cairo issued shortly before a Salafist mob attacked it. But that statement is not much different from a press release that the U.S. embassy in Islamabad issued during the Rushdie affair. The embassy assured Pakistanis "that the U.S. government in no way associates itself with any activity that is in any sense offensive or insulting to Islam or any other religion." No defense of First Amendment freedoms was forthcoming from President George H. W. Bush or Secretary of State James Baker.

When the "cartoon crisis" exploded in 2005, the Department of State said, "We all fully recognize and respect freedom of the press and expression, but it must be coupled with press responsibility. Inciting religious or ethnic hatreds in this manner is not acceptable." This was an extraordinary statement, because incitement to religious or ethnic hatred is prohibited under international human-rights conventions and punishable in most European countries. Accordingly, the U.S. position could be interpreted as supporting the demands of Muslim governments that the editors of *Jyllands-Posten* be subject to criminal sanctions based on speech that in the U.S. would clearly be protected by the First Amendment, and that (as the Danish public prosecutor later determined) did not even meet the threshold required for charging the newspaper under Denmark's hate-speech laws.

On February 3, 2006, a State Department spokesman modified the government's position, stating that "while we certainly don't agree with, support, or in some cases, we condemn the views that are aired in public that are published in media organizations around the world, we, at the same time, defend the right of those individuals to express their views," and that "freedom of expression is at the core of our democracy and it is something that we have shed blood and treasure around the world to defend and we will continue to do so." President George W. Bush tried to bridge the gap between these two widely differing official responses by saying, "We believe in a free press. . . . We also recognize that with freedom comes responsibilities."

Consistent with its apologetic line in the Rushdie affair, the U.K. condemned the Danish cartoons. In the words of Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, "There is freedom of speech, we all respect that. . . . But there is not any obligation to insult or to be gratuitously inflammatory. I believe that the re-publication of these cartoons has been unnecessary. It has been insensitive. It has been disrespectful and it has been wrong." While the Danish government stood firm on freedom of expression at home, it gradually softened its stance abroad as the foreign reactions intensified. In January 2006, Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen commented on the apology issued by *Jyllands-Posten*. While he highlighted the central value of freedom of expression, he went on to say: "I am deeply distressed by the fact that these drawings by many Muslims have been seen as a defamation of the Prophet Mohammed and Islam as a religion. I hope that the apology of the independent newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* will contribute to comfort those that have been hurt."

The timid and defensive response of leading Western governments contrasts with that of Muslim governments and religious leaders. In addition to Iran's recently renewed call for Rushdie's murder, several Muslim governments have demanded the prosecution of the editor responsible for publishing the Mohammed cartoons and the director of *The*

Innocence of Muslims, as well as apologies from Denmark and the U.S. In 1999, member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation initiated a decade-long campaign at the U.N. to prohibit defamation of religion, a campaign that centered on alleged offenses against Islam and ignored those against other religions. It is clear that a large part of the protests in Muslim countries should be attributed to agitation by governments and religious organizations that have exploited religious feelings for their own purposes.

It is also indisputable that a sizeable number of people in Muslim countries feel strongly about the need to protect Islam from being denigrated. But this fact should not affect the way Western governments react to demands that they criminalize or apologize for their citizens' purportedly anti-Islamic expressions. Blaming violence on those who offend religious feelings, and shying away from defending freedom of expression, only lends credibility to the grievances of those who riot. Not only is such a strategy irreconcilable with freedom of expression — *The Satanic Verses*, the Mohammed cartoons, and *The Innocence of Muslims* violate no laws in the countries where they were produced — it is also manifestly ineffective in both calming violence and achieving long-term understanding between Muslim societies and liberal democracies. The press release from the U.S. embassy in Cairo did nothing to stop the frenzied mob, and less than 24 hours after Secretary Clinton had issued her condemnation of the film, violence spread to dozens of other countries, where some protesters burned effigies of President Obama and American flags and violently attacked U.S. facilities.

What these equivocating statements have done is to leave an impression among citizens of Muslim societies that American politicians are weak and ineffective — willing but unable to stop inflammatory expressions — instead of helping them understand that that is not the business of the state. Governments and civil society in Muslim countries should receive a clear message that freedom of expression is a cornerstone of liberal democracy, more important than protecting the religious feelings of believers — and, crucially, they should be told why that is so. This should not be a difficult job. Contrary to the common claim that with so many diverse societies in the world freedom of expression must be restricted to accommodate everyone, free speech is a necessary precondition for peaceful coexistence.

One need only compare the countries where the violence broke out with the countries where the offensive material was produced. Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Sudan all impose severe restrictions on freedom of expression, whereas Great Britain, Denmark, and the U.S. do not. It was in the former countries that protests turned violent, whereas Muslims in the latter countries — with some distressing exceptions — showed their disdain through peaceful demonstrations. Freedom of expression and religion allows Muslims in the West to express such grievances, and indeed to practice their faith in peace, whereas the denial of these rights has seen religious minorities subjected to both official repression and vilification in the very countries where protests are most violent. In societies where citizens are used to being exposed to different ways of thinking, ideas that are hostile to other citizens' religion, politics, or philosophical outlook generate debate and expanded awareness rather than violence. The mayhem in Libya, Egypt, and other societies provided an opportunity for the West to broaden understanding, but it was squandered by pandering that reinforced misunderstanding.

Western states should therefore state unequivocally that they feel as strongly about protecting and preserving the right to freely express one's opinions as Muslim governments feel about protecting Islam. After all, if you find someone's conduct objectionable, you are likely to criticize it even if the perceived wrongdoer offers a justification of his actions. Insisting on the importance of freedom of expression may enlighten Muslim governments about the workings of liberal democracy and civil society, and if we can strengthen freedom of expression and access to information in countries such as Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, it may reduce violence by giving vent to anger and frustration.

As was true during the cartoon crisis, the current protests against *The Innocence of Muslims* are in no small part fueled by inaccurate rumors and deliberate falsehoods, such as the apparently widespread beliefs that the U.S. government sanctioned the movie and that Jewish donors funded it. Strengthening freedom of expression and access to information would limit the ability of nefarious religious leaders and governments to incite violence with such propaganda. A new approach based on a principled defense of free speech may not pay off in the short term. But if Western states are serious about protecting free speech, it is the only sustainable long-term strategy in a world where 60 hours of video is uploaded to YouTube every minute and anybody can spread his or her viewpoints globally with the touch of a smartphone.

US troops punished for Koran burning and urination video

BBC News (28.08.2012) - Six US soldiers have been disciplined for the incineration in February of up to 100 Korans and other religious texts in Afghanistan, the US military said.

They will not face criminal prosecution over the incident, which sparked rioting that claimed at least 30 lives and saw two US troops shot dead.

The investigation said there was no malicious intent to disrespect Islam.

Three US Marines were also disciplined for a video in which the bodies of dead Taliban fighters were urinated on.

For the Koran burning, the six soldiers face "administrative punishments" that could include measures like reduction of rank, extra duty or forfeiture of pay. They are four officers and two non-commissioned officers.

'Secret messages'

In the wake of the 20 February incident, Afghan President Hamid Karzai called for a public trial of the soldiers involved.

His office told the Associated Press news agency Mr Karzai would review the decisions and respond on Tuesday.

The findings showed that up to 100 Korans and other religious texts - a previously undisclosed figure - had been incinerated at Bagram Air Field, a US air base north of Kabul.

Some 53 Korans and 162 other religious books were recovered from the incinerator. All of these texts had been damaged by fire, and about one-third of them were "slightly damaged", according to the report.

They had been removed from the Parwan Detention Centre amid concerns that detainees were using the books to pass secret messages.

A translator was partly blamed in the report for apparently having suggested that most of the texts were extremist in nature, without instructing American forces how to properly dispose of the books.

The report added that warnings from Afghans, including an Afghan soldier, had been ignored - something the investigation attributed in part to distrust between the US troops and Afghans.

But Brigadier General Bryan Watson, the investigating officer, wrote: "I absolutely reject any suggestion that those involved acted with any malicious intent to disrespect the Koran or defame the faith of Islam."

The investigation's findings came on the same day the US Marine Corps announced its punishment for three servicemen who took part in a video in which the bodies of dead Taliban fighters were urinated on.

Three servicemen pleaded guilty: one to "urinating on the body of a deceased Taliban soldier", another to posing for a photo with human casualties, and a third for lying to investigators.

In the video, someone can be heard saying: "Have a good day, buddy."

Their identities have not been revealed and the Marine Corps said it would provide details of disciplinary actions against them at a later date.

Both Islamism and Baathism are spent forces

By Sanir Alpay

Today's Zaman (09.05.2011) / HRWF (09.05.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - When I heard that American soldiers had located and killed al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, I said to my wife, "He was ideologically dead, now he is also physically so." Not knowing then whether he had put up a fight or not, I added, "I wish the Americans had seized him and brought him to justice at the International Criminal Court [ICC]," only to quickly remember that the United States is not party to the ICC and that Americans know all too well how to kill.

I considered bin Laden to be ideologically dead because when his men carried terrorism to its peak by killing nearly 3,000 civilians belonging to 90 different nations in New York, he had announced the beginning of the end for al-Qaeda by arousing deep revulsion to terrorism all over the world. Al-Qaeda, by terrorism in the name of Islam, had provoked the most developed killing machine on earth, the US Army, to invade Afghanistan and Iraq and cause the deaths of tens of thousands of Muslim civilians. It also provided a good excuse for authoritarian Arab regimes to prolong their hold on power. Al-Qaeda managed to kill, indeed, but it did not even come close to achieving any of its declared aims of throwing American armies out of Muslim lands, toppling Arab regimes that collaborated with the US and uniting the Muslim world under an Islamist caliphate.

This year we are witnessing a great awakening in the Arab world. Authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen have fallen one after the other or are on the brink of collapse, unable to resist Arab youth's demands for freedom. Those in Libya and Syria are struggling to survive, but like all the rest are bound to fall. What has led the Arab youth to rise against the autocrats is neither al-Qaeda's network nor its ideology, which attempts to replace the religion of Islam with violent totalitarianism. Arab youth filled the streets against the tyrants, demanding freedom and democracy like in every civilized country in the world.

In the coming days, we may well witness reprisal attacks, but al-Qaeda is essentially a spent force. Olivier Roy, the distinguished scholar of Islamism, sums up its condition well: "It's certainly coincidence that the two events are linked in time, but in fact it's logical because the death of bin Laden symbolized the marginalization of Al-Qaeda in the Middle East." He rightly adds that, together with the Arab spring, the political culture of the 1950s, of secular nationalist, charismatic pan-Arabist leaders, is also dead. (Time magazine, May 2, 2011) This is certainly true of even the Turkish version of Baathism. Efforts to enliven that political culture are doomed to fail also. There is no moral justification for terrorism that indiscriminately kills civilians, by states or non-state actors. Those who resort to terror try to justify their acts with their ideologies of anarchism, communism, nationalism, fascism or Islamism, which are all based on a nihilistic philosophy that rejects morality. One aspect of the fight against terrorism requires, therefore, the intellectual struggle against those ideologies that justify it. The other aspect undoubtedly necessitates eradicating injustices that give rise to terrorism. Turkey is one of the societies that knows this all too well. If the ideological basis of Kurdistan Workers' Party's (PKK) terrorism was Marxism-Leninism, its other basis was a reaction to the denial of the Kurdish identity in Turkey and the brutal suppression of demands for its recognition. If Turkey today can be said to have a higher chance of putting an end to PKK terrorism, that is partly because Marxism-Leninism as an ideology is a spent force and partly because the denial of Kurdish identity has come to an end, while means of peacefully pressing for democratic demands are increasingly open for the Kurds.

Al-Qaeda was fostered by radical Islamist ideology but also by popular hatred towards the efforts of the West, especially those of the US, to impose its will on Muslim societies and support Arab regimes that served its interests, and Israel, which has been occupying and subjugating the Palestinian people for more than 60 years.

There is some hope that the US is learning from past mistakes. President Barack Obama seems to be abandoning the unilateralist and militaristic policies of George W. Bush. He has decided to pull back from Afghanistan and Iraq and is moving towards ending support for Arab autocrats. The Arab spring is profoundly changing the balances in the Middle East, providing an opportunity for Israel, which can achieve lasting security by making peace with the Palestinians and Arab neighbors moving towards establishing representative governments and cooperating with them to increase economic welfare in the region. The Obama administration should not fail to persuade Israel to avail itself of this opportunity and work toward putting an end to alienation between the West and the Muslim world.

The implications of Bin Laden's death for America

By Michael W.S. Ryan

Jamestown Foundation (04.05.2011) / HRWF (05.05.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - The United States has made good on its promise to bring Osama Bin Laden to justice through brilliant intelligence work capped by a precise military operation. Only al-Qaeda or its sympathizers would disagree with the account so far, but at this point the world of opinion splits sharply between those who see the war against al-Qaeda as essentially finished and those, including the Obama Administration, who think that America's "long war" must continue. A review of how al-Qaeda evolved after 9/11 provides strong indications that America has begun to win the war against al-Qaeda, but unfortunately the war is far from over.

Al-Qaeda's Evolution After 9/11

Three to five years before 9/11, al-Qaeda's leadership painstakingly planned not only the attacks of 9/11, but also an entire political military strategy to drive the United States out of the Middle East as an adjunct to overthrowing literally all of the Muslim leaders in the Middle East. The regional priority of this strategy for Bin Laden at least since 2003 has been the Arabian Peninsula, which contains the petroleum based key to America's economic and military strength. The next priority is Pakistan with its large, fractious population and nuclear weapons. Iraq was an opportunity for recruitment once American forces invaded, but Bin Laden's involvement was mainly rhetorical.

Al-Qaeda's leadership and their closest advisors schooled themselves in American defense debates about fourth generation warfare and how to fight small wars. [1] They combed American strategic studies to find flaws in American power that they could exploit. But most of all, they studied the works of Mao translated into Arabic and read the strategists of the Cuban Revolution and the Vietnamese war against both the French and the Americans. [2] They also studied insurrections that did not work in the Middle East and elsewhere to avoid mistakes. They developed a political narrative based on their analysis of America's role in the Middle East. Al-Qaeda's leaders then crafted a jihadist narrative designed to appeal to a Muslim audience and clothed communist insurgency tactics and strategy in Islamic symbols to obscure its origins. The main lessons al-Qaeda derived from their insurgency studies is that political/ideological considerations should drive every act of violence and that time is on the side of the insurgent.

After America's counterattack against al-Qaeda and its Taliban hosts in Afghanistan succeeded beyond all expectations in the months following 9/11, neither Osama Bin Laden nor his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri expected to escape death at the hands of the United States or its allies for very long after their flight into Pakistan. They did not abandon their insurrectionist strategy, but they constructed a new international terrorist system to replace their previous hierarchical organization. By design, this new system did not depend on the leadership of one or two individuals. The new system was meant to outlive either man and carry on al-Qaeda's jihadist project.

Al-Qaeda's current system includes three interlocking terrorist circles. The first circle is the central core that contains the leadership and its closest advisors to provide political and ideological guidance (but not command and control). The second circle includes what one strategist referred to as "open fronts," which Westerners sometimes refer to as affiliates. In al-Qaeda's terms open fronts include regional guerrilla warfare but also recruiting, establishing, and training cells of the third circle. The third circle is what we sometimes refer to as "homegrown" or "sleeper cells." [3] Sleeper cells so far have been rarely successful in the United States, but real threats are often disrupted. When third circle attacks are successful, however, as in the Madrid Train bombing in 2004, the London suicide bombings in 2005, or the Nidal Hasan shootings at Fort Hood in 2009, the results are dire.

What Comes Next?

Killing Osama Bin Laden should not be seen as the end of America's international counterterrorism campaign, because the international system he set up is still active and will remain so for some time. Bin Laden's death is definitely a heavy blow to the organization both in morale and ideological effectiveness. His death, however, will have no operational effect on Yemen, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, or North Africa because he did not control these organizations. We should expect all of these organizations to begin planning some sort of terrorist response. We should not expect them to work together on this effort, which will make their planning harder to detect. Cells outside the Middle East and South Asia could also be involved on an individual basis.

The central circle sometimes referred to as "al-Qaeda Central" will need to reestablish itself. Ayman al-Zawahiri will likely take up this role, but not as a replacement for Bin Laden; instead, the dead leader will remain as an iconic figure, a martyr, much as Sayyid Qutb became a powerful iconic figure to jihadists after his execution by the Egyptian Government in 1966. Other inspirational voices will emerge in the younger ranks, like Abu Yahya al-Libi, but we must wait to see whether a paramount leader will emerge as such.

Some have argued that affiliates expressed their formal allegiance (bay'ah) to Bin Laden and not to al-Qaeda, so his death should mean the break-up of the organization described above. This is not strictly accurate. [4] These pledges have taken a number of forms but are often a pledge to al-Qaeda while acknowledging Bin Laden as the leader. Others have argued that al-Zawahiri is a strident figure and not liked; on the other hand, he is respected as a leader who has paid his dues, which is probably what counts in the short run.

Finally, the death of Bin Laden should not influence American decisions about American troop deployments. The decisions to end our deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan have already been made; the only issue is timing. Many Americans want to end our deployments as soon as possible; others disagree. There are valid arguments to be made about costs of these deployments. The timing of pulling troops out of Iraq, however, should be based on agreements with Iraq and considerations of Iranian activities. Iraq is perfectly capable of attacking al-Qaeda within its own borders. Similarly, the decision on troop deployments in Afghanistan has had little to do with Bin Laden despite our stated goal of preventing an al-Qaeda return to Afghanistan.

The best weapon we have against terrorism and al-Qaeda is the continuity of a winning counterterrorism policy and a deliberate foreign policy upon which our allies can rely. For our own security, we need to continue to show al-Qaeda that they cannot wait us out.

Notes:

1. See Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi's articles on in Al-Ansar online electronic journal: for example: "Fourth Generation Warfare" (in Arabic) al-Ansar, Number 2, January 28, 2002; also al-Qurashi's "Revolutionary Wars" (in Arabic) available at <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=kfjxiygb>; the works of Abu Bakr Naji and Abu Mus'ab al-Suri also contain references to Mao, General Giap, Che Guevara, Regis Debray, and Fidel Castro as well as American sources.

2. References to studies on guerrilla warfare abound in the writings of al-Qaeda's strategic thinkers and operators. For one example in which the author refers to Mao's concept of the "war of the flea" without a citation to Mao see: Cigar, Norman, Al-Qa'ida's Doctrine for Insurgency: 'Abd Al-'Aziz Al-Muqrin's A Practical Course for Guerrilla War, 2009, Potomac Books, p. 92

3. See the translation of Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's "The Relationship between Open Front Jihad and Individual Terrorism"4 in Lia, Brynjar. Architect of Global Jihad, 2009, Columbia University Press, pp. 436/7; al-Suri was writing this account as a recommendation but it appears to match how groups in Yemen and Pakistan relate to would-be terrorists in the United States.

4. For example, see Zarqawi's pledge to al-Qaeda (in Arabic) at <http://66.45.228.55/pr?i=6912> or Zawahiri's characterization of the Algerian group (GSPC) pledge to al-Qaeda here <http://www.archive.org/details/salafiaa--Z>.

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