

America's Middle East stand and anti-Muslim feelings

Islam
F.P.
12-8-04

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A Pentagon advisory panel finds "the United States is losing the war of ideas in the Islamic world, failing to elucidate its policies to Muslims wary of American intentions and self-serving hypocrisy," reports Reuters news service.

The Defence Science Board urged the creation of a "strategic communication" apparatus within the White House and an overhaul of public diplomacy, public affairs and information dissemination efforts by the Pentagon and State Department. "If we really want to see the Muslim world as a whole and the Arabic-speaking world in particular move more towards our understanding of 'moderation' and 'tolerance', we must reassure Muslims that this does not mean that they must submit to the American way," the report stated.

The tough-worded report said that while America's efforts to explain its policies have failed, improved public relations efforts cannot sell faulty policies. "Muslims do not hate our freedom, but rather they hate our policies," the panel stated.

The US now has its first broadcasting outlet dedicated

to communicating to and about Islam. The Islamic Broadcasting Network (IBN) has been established as the prime media outlet for the American Muslim community in the US. IBN is an affiliate of the Islamic Media Foundation, a national non-profit organisation based in the Washington DC area. Its mission is to share the guidance of Allah through broadcast media and the Internet, to encourage the right and discourage the wrong, and to provide the American Muslim community with programming that will cater to their needs. According to the IBN website, "we aim to promote Islam and Muslim efforts in America, stress our contribution to the well-being of this society, as well as to present our views on current events, and thus strengthen our own bonds and pride in our Islamic identity. Through our broadcast, we also endeavour to clarify and correct stereotypes and any inaccurate portrayals of our values, and religion to our American neighbours".

Personalities on two of America's most watched early morning television talk shows are being criticised for anti-Islamic comments made on

the aid. The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee "is troubled by the ongoing racist comments expressed by Jack Cafferty on CNN's 'American Morning' programme". Cafferty's frequent remarks regarding the Arab and Muslim world during "The Cafferty Files", his segment of the show, are "overtly racist, hostile and dehumanise the Arab and Muslim peoples".

The Council on American-Islamic Relations called on American Muslims and other people of conscience to contact the MSNBC cable television network to demand an apology for comments made on its "Imus in the Morning" programme that referred to Palestinians as "filthy animals" and suggested that they all be killed. They also asked that the programme's host, Don Imus, "be reprimanded for failing to challenge his colleagues' inflammatory remarks".

Amnesty International reports its concern about the status of Ahmed Abu Ali, a United States citizen currently imprisoned in Al Ha'ir prison in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The

organisation reports: "He was reportedly arrested by Saudi Arabian authorities on June 11, 2003, in the city of Medina, while taking an exam at the Islamic University there, and has been held in Riyadh ever since. It is not clear whether he has been charged with a crime, nor is it clear when, or if, he will be put on trial. US officials have been interested in Ali because of an alleged connection to a now concluded Virginia terrorism case.

During the July 2003 bail hearing of Sabri Benkhala, one of the Virginia defendants, Ali was mentioned as an associate of his, and it was alleged that (he) had confessed to belonging to Al Qaeda during Saudi Arabian interrogations observed by the FBI.

"Ali denied to his family that he had ever made such a confession, and the allegation was not repeated during the March 2004 trial, where Benkhala was acquitted of all charges. The US consul failed to visit Ali until almost a month after his detention. During a September 2003 interrogation by FBI officials,

Ali was reportedly threatened with being declared an 'enemy combatant' and being sent to Guantanamo Bay, or with a trial in Saudi Arabia where he would have no legal defence. After that encounter, Ali was placed in solitary confinement for three months. Between November 2003 and February 2004, the US consul halted the monthly visits he had been making.

During this time, Ali was told by Saudi Arabian authorities that his trial was approaching. US officials have not facilitated legal representation for Ali, nor have they discovered what, if anything, he has been charged with."

United Press International reports in The Washington Times: "Eighty per cent of Muslims living in Britain claim to have been discriminated against based on their religion."

Published by the Open Society Institute to launch Islam Awareness Week, the report called on the government to "do more to tackle discrimination and engage the Muslim community in society". The study said between 2001 and 2003, the number of Asian people stopped and

searched under the Terrorism Act rose by 302 per cent, compared to 230 per cent for black people and 118 per cent for whites. Two thirds of British Muslims felt they were perceived and treated differently from other groups, and 32 per cent said they had been discriminated against at British airports because of their religion.

News 8, a television programme in Austin, Texas, reports: "Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the United States. It's predicted to overtake Judaism and come in second to Christianity within the next few decades. Its growth is mainly due to two reasons - the number of Muslim immigrants flocking to America and the number of Americans converting to Islam."

"We are a part of the US community, and there are facets to our community that people should know about," Austin Muslim Zafar Sadiq said. There are about 1,200 mosques in America, more than half of which were founded in the last 20 years. Texas has about 70 mosques, and Austin is home to seven. Five Austin mosques are Sunni, one is Shiite and the other belongs to the Nation of Islam.