

Guest Comment

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Who CAIRs?

Anatomy of misplaced outrage.

By Shawn Steel

primary task of any political-party chairman is to recruit new leaders from new communities into the party. This is particularly true in California, where I recently ended a two-year term as chairman of the California Republican party. During that time, I directly sponsored more minority clubs for formal chartering than any prior chair. I made a special point of outreaching to Arab and Muslim Americans. I personally encouraged a considerable number of Muslims to assume active leadership in the California Republican party. I had the first Muslim prayer given at our state-party convention, appointed Muslims to important party positions, and encouraged the chartering of Arab and Muslim Republican clubs.

I strongly believe Muslims who are first-generation Americans are natural Republican allies. Devotion to intact families, strong religious beliefs, commitment to educational excellence, and a self-reliant ethos that inspires entrepreneurial success — are all values shared by most Muslims and Republicans.

In light of my pro-Muslim track record, readers will share my astonishment at the vicious firestorm of abuse that has been directed at me personally following a widely made observation about contemporary Islam. A few weeks ago, I was invited by the University of Southern California chapter of the College Republicans to speak at a "support our troops" rally, at which I applauded the success of our troops, the president's vision, and the liberation for the Iraqi people.

So far so good. Then, I went on to say "The Islamic community has a cancer growing within it, which hates Jews, hates freedom, and hates Western society...the disease within Islam must be rectified" — some something as obvious as it is politically incorrect.

A huge outcry followed — one compounded by the subsequent article in the *Daily Trojan* (USC's student newspaper) that misquoted me as stating "The disease OF Islam must be

rectified" (emphasis added) — transmitting my comment into an excoriation of the world's second largest religion as a "disease." The newly installed editor has since printed a retraction.

Out of nowhere, I now find myself subject of a national protest campaign organized by a group called Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). For example, CAIR described several incidents by different Republican and conservative organizations of actions against Islam. They described my misquoted statements as "anti-Muslim bigotry spewed by a minority of hate-mongers...."

In politics I have been called many names but "hate monger" is a new one. CAIR recommended to its e-mail list to have me repudiated by the California Republican party, for a statement I did not make.

YOU'VE GOT HATE MAIL

My in-box is being jammed with literally hundreds of unsolicited e-mails generated by CAIR and copied to various California Republican leaders, demanding I apologize for a comment I never made. CAIR is also hounding the state GOP to disown me.

O.K., I can understand why an organization like CAIR would be upset — if I had actually castigated Islam as diseased. But I did not. I reminded the *Daily Trojan* of that fact, and demanded a correction. I informed CAIR they were responding to a misquote and asked them to call off their troops — to no avail.

Being misquoted is a predictable side effect of leftist journalism. I've been punching and getting punched for years, which I expect in the course of honest political debate.

What I didn't expect was the depth of hatred and alienation from so many American Muslims. Of the hundreds of messages I've received as a result of this CAIR-organized e-mail bombardment, not one has contained a good word for the president. None expressed any support for our troops or for the liberation of their fellow Muslims in Iraq from the tyrannical yoke of radical secularist Saddam Hussein. The incessant refrain was I was hateful for warning against a poisoned element of contemporary Islam, or simply spiteful broadsides against Israel.

A review of a few of the responses I received was quite an education for me; I have not included the senders e-mail addresses or names out of respect for their privacy:

- Mr. Rumsfield and Cheney along with Wolfowitz are a bunch of murderers, plunderers and should be tried for war crimes.
- You will never get rid of us. Will marry and have children with the born Muslim man from....You can't stop it and we will increase in numbers.
- The problem is that we Americans lump Democracy together with Capitalism and Consumerism....American values are pushed down the throats of the world population as being the best and far superior to ones that people have had for hundreds and maybe thousands of years. Capitalism has only benefited the US and it's corporations while exploiting the third world and robbing them of their natural resources....

- Not only Muslim countries, but the overwhelming majority of third world countries reject Capitalism under the guise of Democracy, as Capitalism cannot be sustained unless others are being exploited
- 1. The US Government is a failure of a democracy and is instead in effect an aristocracy....Muslims are also very angry with Mr. Bush because of his recent actions that discriminate against Muslims such as the wrongly-termed Patriot Act...
- 2. The only reason that more Muslims are supporting violence is that there is a lot of unrest with respect to America's wars against Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq, etc....
- 3. All of the violence that occurs in Israel, including the suicide bombing, is as a direct result of Israeli oppression.
- ...are you aware that the MAJORITY of the world's population sees Mr. Bush as a greater threat to world peace than Saddam or Bin Ladin or North Korea? (recent opinion polls by western pollsters)...a majority of the world's population that sees the war on Iraq as not a war of "liberation" but a war of aggression, occupation and Imperialistic control of resources and regional politics....
- What is true, however, is that Muslims (and the rest of the world) despise the practices of the American government when its force is used callously.
- The Palestinians are treated cruelly and harshly every day and the U.S. remains silent. That is why the Muslims always bring up the issue of Israel.
- I suggest that US should stop supporting Israeli and now Indian Terrorism against Muslims. Should stop changing the governments, including democracies.

FRIENDS AND FOES

These quotes impressed to me that America has a large number of Muslims desperately unhappy with our republic, our way of life, our president, and our policy of liberation in the Middle East.

One can speculate why CAIR has chosen to burn bridges with a friend to the Muslim community. Very likely, those who dominate CAIR see attacking me as a chance to denounce all things Republican and to stifle any debate determining moderate Muslims from fanatic ones.

CAIR is politically smart and tough. They motivate their supporters with "urgent appeals" and blame "horrid" acts committed by Ashcroft and the federal government. But CAIR seems to have been captured by its own "radicals."

CAIR's history is checkered. CAIR defended convicted blind sheikh, Omar Abdel Rahman, who planned the first 1993 World Trade Center bombing. CAIR apologized for the twin East African-embassy bombings, as a "misunderstanding of both sides." When President Bush closed the "Holy Land Foundation" as a terrorist front for Hamas, CAIR loudly complained it was "unjust" and "disturbing."

More recent, one individual who led the attack against me made some interesting comments. CAIR's southern California executive director, Hussam Ayloush co-hosted an event in May 1998

at which an Egyptian militant Islamic leader, Wagdi Ghunaym, call Jews the "descendants of the apes." National Chairman Omar Ahmad made an astonishing and troublesome admission when he told a crowd of California Muslims in July 1998, "Islam isn't in America to be equal to any other faith, but to become dominant. The Koran . . . should be the highest authority in America. And Islam the only accepted religion on earth...."

CAIR wants an apology. Instead, they need to apologize

— *Shawn Steel is the immediate past chairman of the California Republican party.*