

“The Innocence of Muslims”: Blasphemy as a Political Tactic

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The circulation on the Internet of the trailer for a film, [The Innocence of Muslims](#), sparked demonstrations across the world and resulted in the killing in Benghazi of the U.S. Ambassador to Libya and members of his entourage.

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At first glance, these events can be located in the long line leading from Salman Rushdie's Satanic Verses to the burnings of the Koran by Pastor Terry Jones. Nevertheless, this new attack differs from other incidents in that the film was not directed at a Western audience but instead was uniquely conceived as an instrument of provocation directed at Muslims.

In political terms, the affair can be analyzed from two angles: from the tactical perspective as an anti-U.S. manipulation; or from a strategic one, as an anti-Muslim psychological attack.

The film was produced by a Zionist group composed of Jews of double Israeli-American nationality and by an Egyptian Copt. It was completed several months ago but was released at a calculated moment to provoke riots targeting the United States.

Israeli agents were deployed in several large cities with a mission to channel the rage of the crowd against American or Coptic targets (though not Israeli ones). Not surprisingly, their maximum effect was attained in Benghazi, the capital of Libya's Cyrenaica region.

The population of Benghazi is known to harbor particularly reactionary and racist groups. It is useful to recall that at the time the cartoons of Mohammed appeared in September, 2005, Salafists attacked the Danish Consulate. In keeping with the Vienna Convention on diplomacy, the Libyan government of Muammar al-Gaddafi deployed troops to protect the diplomatic service then under attack. The repression of the riot resulted in numerous deaths. Subsequently, the West, seeking to overthrow the Libyan regime, financed Salafist publications which accused Gaddafi of protecting the Danish Consulate because he had allegedly been behind the cartoon operation.

On February 15, 2011, Salafists organized in Benghazi a demonstration commemorating the massacre during which shooting erupted, an incident that marked the beginning of the Benghazi insurrection that opened the way to the NATO intervention. The Libyan police arrested three members of the Italian Special Forces who confessed to having fired from the rooftops on both demonstrators and the police to sow chaos and confusion. Held prisoner

throughout the war that followed, they were released when NATO seized the capital and smuggled them out of the country to Malta in a small fishing boat on which I was also a passenger.

This time, the manipulation of the Benghazi crowd by Israeli agents had as its goal the assassination of the U.S. Ambassador, an act of war not seen since the Israeli bombardment of the USS Liberty by the Israeli Air Force and Navy in 1967. This constitutes the first assassination of an ambassador in the line of duty since 1979. The act is all the more grievous considering that in a country where the current central government is a purely legal fiction, the U.S. Ambassador was not merely a diplomat but was functioning as Governor, as the de facto head of state.

It should be emphasized that in the past few weeks, the highest-ranking U.S. military officers have entered into open conflict with the Israeli government. They have issued declarations signifying their intention to halt the cycle of wars begun after September 11 (Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria) and which, in light of the informal agreements of 2001, will expand further (Sudan, Somalia and Iran). The first warning shot occurred in Afghanistan, in August 2012, when two missiles were fired at the parked plane of General Martin Dempsey, head of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. This second warning turned out to be even more brutal.

If, on the other hand, we examine this affair from the viewpoint of social psychology, the release of the film and its aftermath appear to be a frontal attack on the beliefs of Muslims. In this regard, it is similar in nature to the Pussy Riot episode trampling on the freedom of religious practice inside the Orthodox Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow and the multiple performances of conceptual pornography the group engaged in afterwards. These are operations geared to violate societies that resist the project of global domination.

In democratic and multicultural societies, the sacred is seen as belonging to and being expressed within the private sphere. But a new collective space of the sacred has been in the process of elaboration. Western European states have passed “historical memory” laws which have transformed a historical event—the Nazi destruction of European Jews—into a religious occurrence: the “Shoa” in Jewish terminology, or the “Holocaust” as expressed in Christian evangelical parlance. Nazi crimes are thereby elevated to the level of a unique event at the expense of the victims of other massacres, including other victims of the Nazis. Questioning the dogma, i.e. this religious interpretation of historical facts, subjects one to criminal penalties, just as blasphemy was punished in the past. Similarly, in 2001, the U.S., the European Union member states and a number of their allies imposed by decree that entire national populations must observe a minute of silence in memory of the victims of the September 11 attacks. This ruling was underpinned by an ideological interpretation of the causes of the massacre. In both cases, having been killed because one was Jewish or because one was American confers a particular status on these victims before whom the rest of humanity must genuflect.

During the Olympic Games in London, both the Israeli and the American delegations attempted to enlarge their sacred space still further by imposing a minute of silence during the opening ceremony of the most-watched televised event in the world, this time on behalf of the hostages seized during the Munich Games of 1972. In the end, the proposal was rejected, with the Olympic Committee holding instead a separate ceremony. This is just a further indication of the effort to create a collective liturgy legitimating the global empire.

The Innocence of Muslims serves both as a device to bring Washington back into line at a moment when it may be stepping back from the Zionist agenda and as a means of pursuing it further by attacking the faith of still others who resist it.

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