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Islamophobia on the rise in the U.S., but some still reject it

BY M. BASHEER AHMED

Special to the Star-Telegram

By now, most of us have heard or read about Ahmed Mohamed, the 14-year-old ninth-grade student at MacArthur High School in Irving who built a digital clock inside a briefcase and brought it to school to impress his fellow students and teachers.

Instead of being commended, Ahmed was handcuffed and taken to a detention center, where he was fingerprinted and had his mugshot taken because the teacher thought the clock looked like a bomb.

No charges were filed, Ahmed was released and the police considered the case closed.

Then, unfortunately, Irving Mayor Beth Van Duyne and even the Republican Party took full advantage of this incident and brought unrelated subjects like Sharia law and Muslim terrorism into it, stating that Muslim leaders are not doing enough to criticize terrorists.

This also gave them the opportunity to criticize President Obama's policies on terrorism and to create more Islamophobia.

Islamophobia (prejudicial views about Islam and negative stereotypical images of Muslims) is a huge problem that affects "ordinary" Muslims who are seeking simply to carry on quietly with their lives.

I have lived in the United States for 47 years, and I've noticed that Americans love to have an arch enemy.

The U.S. rounded up thousands of innocent Japanese during World War II and held them in detention centers. In the 1950s, communism and communists became the arch enemies.

It wasn't until the 1990s that Islamophobia started taking roots, but it has gotten worse since 9-11. Muslims have become the new arch enemy.

But it's a political phenomenon that has very little to do with religion.

According to a study conducted by RAND Corp., of the 83 terrorist attacks that occurred in the U.S. between Sept. 11, 2001, and the end of 2009, only three were "clearly connected with the jihadist cause."

This year alone, according to [Shooting Tracker](#), there have been 208 mass shootings in the U.S. ("mass shooting" is defined as four or more people shot in one incident). Only one (the July 16 Chattanooga murders) was committed by a Muslim.

For non-Muslim shooting suspects, the news media seldom mention their religion. In nearly every case, they are said to have been suffering from some sort of mental instability.

These suspects were often ostracized from both society and family, deeply depressed and suicidal. People thusly afflicted, given easy access to guns, sometimes kill people, lots of them.

Yet the media immediately identified the motivation of Mohammad Youssef Abdulazeez to be radical Islam when he recently killed five U.S. soldiers in Chattanooga.

Stopping radical Muslims still seems to be at the forefront of the discussion, rather than how to stop mass shootings that have little or nothing to do with Islam.

For Ahmed Mohamed and his family, his arrest was both shocking and humiliating, but it turned out to be extremely positive when he got a call from President Obama inviting him to participate in astronomy night with NASA astronauts and other young people.

Close to a million people tweeted their support.

[Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg invited him for a visit. Twitter invited him to take an internship.](#)

Reddit wanted to introduce Ahmed to some of its friends in science. Astrophysicist Chanda Prescod invited him to tour the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as a "creative independent thinker."

Even the president of MIT tweeted that the university was delighted that Ahmed was interested in MIT.

Can you believe that in the U.S., where Islamaphobia is rising and the Republican presidential candidates are pushing to get more votes by creating a fear of Muslims, a large number of well-respected institutions and business enterprises are welcoming Ahmed?

Despite the news media and government attempts to further Islamophobia, clearly understanding and compassion still thrive. This can happen only in the United States.

I have a strong hope that the Muslims pass through this challenge from limited groups and overcome it. Ahmed's story shows the positive side of our country, which respects scholastic achievements and hard work.

I am pleased to see there are still those in this country who treat people as individuals and judge them for who they are, not blaming one religion for the evils of all men.

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