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A National Commission on Terrorism: Fighting Racial Profiling With Racial Profiling

Editor

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Title: A National Commission on Terrorism: Fighting Racial Profiling With Racial Profiling

Author: Editor

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Abstract. This article attributes controversy over personnel selection for a United States national commission to a welter of witting and unwitting racial, racist, and sexist concerns.

The formal and public intent behind the creation of a United States (US) national commission on terrorism is to afford the opportunity for a small group of people with appropriate knowledge, wisdom, and experience to make antiterrorism and counterterrorism recommendations. Just as such commissions are almost always inconsequential in import and impact, they are stocked with people who--through deceptively different pathways--are judged to be of consequence.

One Muslim-American nominee, Salam Al-Marayati, executive director of the Muslim Public Affairs Council in Los Angeles, has been withdrawn from the selection process. Both the nomination and its withdrawal seem to have been based on similar criteria that have been differentially construed: Al-Marayati's ethnic identifications and his serious thinking about terrorism.

Al-Marayati's being Arabic apparently filled a square to have a committee member identified with an ethnic label that often has been unfairly associated in the US with the perpetration of terrorism. His inclusion would show that the committee was fair. The same would apply to his being a Muslim. On the other hand, his being Arabic and Muslim also was viewed by other committees, organizations, and activists as suggestive of supporting terrorism--or at least terrorism against Jews. His inclusion in the committee on terrorism would then depict the committee as unfair. The two main sides to the Al-Marayati controversy agreed that he had serious thoughts on terrorism--but such thoughts merely served to multiply his "fairness quotient" in the first case, his "unfairness quotient" in the second.

And the Arab Muslim's serious thoughts on terrorism? He has been attacked for stating that Israeli actions have incited Palestinian terrorism--even if some of these actions have indeed incited terrorist behavior and even if incitement does not necessarily obviate the moral, ethical, and legal violations of terrorism. He also has been attacked for at times supporting violence against Israeli military personnel in Lebanon--even if these personnel are illegally occupying a sovereign country (legally sovereign, not de facto sovereign) and even if Lebanese, their Syrian hegemony, and Israelis all may have just moral and ethical concerns in the matter. Al Marayati also has been accused of supporting the social and cultural activities of groups like Hamas which also engage in terrorism--even if such support does not necessarily applaud terrorism and even if terrorism does not necessarily negate good works.

Most recently, the selection controversy has been managed by splitting differences. A new nominee, Juliette Kayyem, is also Arab but Christian and married to a Jewish lawyer. (This, known under bated breath in politically correct circles as a "threefer," might rise to a "fivefer" and even higher depending on the currency of politics concerning lawyers, being married, interreligious marriages, notions of whether "Jewish" is a race or ethnicity or religion, and so on.) Also, she is female not male--thus less dangerous to traditional sexists, as dangerous to those supporting the equality of the sexes, and more dangerous to feminists purporting the greater strength of women. (All three sets of observers are equally ignorant of the history of terrorism and political violence.) Moreover, her serious thinking seems to have been less

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on terrorism per se but more on the civil rights implications of racial profiling used in an airport antiterrorism mode and of deportation as an antiterrorism and counterterrorism tool.

This last observation is quite fitting, for the entire affair so far reeks of racial, if not racist and sexist, profiling--especially as ethnocentricity and racism often are used interchangeably and even more often are based along with sexism on similar psychological dynamics. At least some nominees for the terrorism committee are judged appropriate or not based on outright stereotyping and political calculation of demographically and experientially induced imagery. One thing for sure. The terrorist adversaries of the US can rest easy on this one. (See Ford, T.E., Grossman, R.W., & Jordan, E.A. (1997). Teaching about unintentional racism in introductory psychology. *Teaching of Psychology*, 24, 186-188; Goodstein, L. (July 31, 1999). Arab named to U.S. panel on terrorism. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Goodsetin, L. (July 10, 1999). Muslims denounce Gephardt for withdrawing a nominee. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Goodstein, L. (July 9, 1999). Gephardt bows To Jews' anger over a nominee. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Hopkins, N., Reicher, S., & Levine, M. (1997). On the parallels between social cognition and the "new racism." *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 36, 305-329; Jeanquart-Barone, S., & Sekaran, U. (1996). Institutional racism: An empirical study. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 136, 477-482.) (Keywords: Racial Profiling, Terrorism.)