

The 'Innocence of Muslims' Video: Why All the Fuss?

Written by Stephen McGlinchey

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

The 'Innocence of Muslims' Video: Why All the Fuss?

<https://www.e-ir.info/2012/09/15/the-innocence-of-muslims-video-why-all-the-fuss/>

STEPHEN MCGLINCHEY, SEP 15 2012

It will have been difficult to have not seen the recent news reports of violence across North Africa and the Middle East. The immediate cause of the violence has been blamed on an inflammatory video that is discriminatory towards Islam. The violence has been blamed for the murder of the US ambassador to Libya and a mounting number of attacks on other US embassies.

Further, in the aftermath of the first wave of attacks, embassies of non US nations such as Germany and the UK have also been targeted in what seems to be a sporadic and semi-anarchical wave of fury directed at the West. Even Prince Harry, who is currently deployed in Afghanistan, was targeted. At the time of writing the incident looks to be escalating further with no end in sight. The US State Department is in full blown crisis mode and US warships are moving into place.

So, what is this mystery video? And, why is it so provocative?

The video is currently available in a 14 minute preview on YouTube. YouTube's owners Google have refused to remove it. Instead they have agreed to block it in several countries where violence has broken out. Having watched it my personal reaction is one of being underwhelmed.

The movie is extremely low budget, awfully acted, and even more awfully produced (terrible green screened locations and props). It has a script that is laughably wooden. The politics is crude and one dimensional. It is clearly the work of an amateur with a bit of money and absolutely no skill whatsoever. To believe the rumours sweeping the Arab world that this is the work of Israeli or US intelligence services is, to put it bluntly, lacking in intelligence. The entire cast have contacted CNN noting that they were misled by the film-maker who allegedly gave them scripts that were incomplete and/or unclear so that they were unaware of the true nature of the finished product. Though with some of the lines/scenes they were delivering you have to wonder how defensible this excuse is. (see for yourself)

Still, to blame this movie clip, its actors, or its pseudonym-ed maker (who is a known fraudster with a criminal record) for the events that are sweeping across the Arab world is ridiculous. I cannot believe that anyone who watched this clip would find it anything other than silly. It is nothing more than another home made soap box statement, the likes of which are plentiful on YouTube. You do not need to go far to find much worse than this on the internet regarding portrayals of Islam (or of any religion/way of life/etc.). For these reasons, interpreting this wave of violence as a reaction to this silly movie clip is erroneous. There is clearly something else at play here. At the heart of this assertion is the fact that the 'offending' video premièred months ago and has been online since 2 July. Why has violence only broken out now? It doesn't matter if the mystery maker/s are Jewish, Coptic Christian, American or whatever. All that matters is that the product does not match the reaction.

With these points in mind, all we are left with as this incident continues to escalate is a series of questions:

- 1) Is the movie being used by extremist forces in Libya and Egypt to attempt to radicalise the emergent political processes there? (definitely).
- 2) Is the movie being used by al-Qaeda as anti U.S. propaganda in an attempt to take the initiative following the

The 'Innocence of Muslims' Video: Why All the Fuss?

Written by Stephen McGlinchey

death of bin Laden? (probably).

3) Have any of the enraged people on the streets seen and more importantly *understood the video clip in its context* (most probably not).

4) Has the violence got something to do with discrediting a fairly popular U.S. president in the Islamic world coming up to election time? (possibly)

5) Is the Salafi movement involved (possibly)

And so on...

The only real solution to the rioting and mob attacks is for the forces of sanity to reclaim their streets and stamp out this behaviour. Those who follow history know what happens when populations who are whipped up into a frenzy disrespect international rules of diplomacy and hospitality. No one wants to see a repeat of 1979. In a scenario such as that, no one wins. If the new governments of Libya, Egypt (etc.) want to make this kind of behaviour part of their political consciousness, then they really have not triumphed in their respective Arab springs. Instead, they have taken a series of steps backward.

It really does not help when Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi took two days to finally call for restraint and calm, yet still added flames to the fire by officially condemning the video and standing still while the Brotherhood called for a million people to march against the video. Why condemn something not worthy of attention? It only serves to draw attention to it and raise tempers further. Shouldn't Morsi stand up and say something along the lines of:

This video was made by some braindead idiot, who is a known felon and does not even have the courage to use his own name. So, why waste your time rioting about it? How will the world respect our emerging nation with this kind of overreaction and temperament on its streets?

By way of comparison (though not intentionally feeding the West VS Islam dichotomy) – would president Obama take time out of his schedule to condemn one of the dozens of right wing Christian fundamentalist videos that flood onto the internet annually, and organise a march of 'sanity'? Of course he wouldn't. In that sense, the strangely duplicitous reaction of the political world in the Middle East (of which Morsi is just one example) remains the real burning question here.

While there are many more questions than answers over this series of events, one thing is for certain: the violence sweeping across the Middle East has absolutely *nothing* to do with this video.

About the author:

Dr Stephen McGlinchey is the Editor-in-Chief and Publisher of E-International Relations and Senior Lecturer of International Relations at UWE Bristol. His publications include *Foundations of International Relations* (Bloomsbury 2022), *International Relations* (2017), *International Relations Theory* (2017) and *US Arms Policies Towards the Shah's Iran* (Routledge 2021, 2014). You can find him on twitter @mcglincheyst or LinkedIn.