

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: [Guest Post] Islamophobia and the War Machine

The Takeaway:

- This week marks 5 years since Trump's Muslim Ban. While one of the most blatant acts of anti-Muslim oppression in modern U.S. history, it is firmly rooted in decades of dehumanizing U.S. policy that has promoted violence to uphold U.S. empire.
- By dehumanizing Muslims, the U.S. can more readily justify wars, sanctions, assassinations, and discriminatory policies — since those largely suffering from these policies are no longer seen as human.
- The post-9/11 wars and the current, adversarial U.S. policy towards Iran are glaring examples of how “othering” Muslims serves U.S. political purposes, with devastating consequences for people at home and abroad.

Dehumanizing Muslims, Justifying War

Five years ago this week, the Trump administration's Executive Order 13769 — [the first Muslim Ban](#) — prohibited foreign nationals from seven predominantly Muslim countries from traveling to the United States, and suspended the resettlement of all Syrian refugees. On this ignominious anniversary, we are thrilled to bring you a guest post by Dr. Assal Rad, Senior Research Fellow at the National Iranian American Council (NIAC) and author of the recent report [“Othering Iran: How Dehumanization of Iranians Undermines Rights at Home.”](#)

U.S. foreign policy is shaped by many things: the warmongering of demagogues, the arms industry's drive for profits, the pervasive belief that the United States can only be a force for good. However, there is one key driver of the militaristic status quo — one foundational pillar — that is often ignored in Beltway foreign policy discussions: dehumanization.

It is easier to bomb nations or starve them with sanctions, when an entire people becomes a faceless “other,” stripped of their humanity. The proclivity toward war in U.S. foreign policy both promotes, and is influenced by, the systematic dehumanization of its victims. Muslims, and all those perceived as Muslim, are swept up in its path. Five years after the Muslim Ban, it is clear that this policy was not an exception in the scheme of U.S. foreign policymaking; it was yet another iteration of the rule.

Colonial Roots to Neocolonial Intervention

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While the “othering” of Muslims has very old roots, the periods of European colonialism and later U.S. imperialism, are still of particular relevance to our current state of affairs. Here, [orientalism](#) and its kin became a part of the ideological edifice that justified the brutal exploitation of non-European peoples. Empire was not presented as an oppressive force intended to dispossess people of their resources and rights, but rather, as a benevolent force that would benefit its victims and “civilize” them. The suffering that resulted from this purported [civilizing process](#) was a small price to pay, in any case, because they were “lesser” from the start.

But even as anti-colonial movements won hard-fought battles to attain their political independence over the course of the 20th century, [the exploitation](#) — and the justification thereof — lived on. By extending power across the world, in its many and changing forms, imperialism continued to interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign states. Such was the case of the 1953 coup in Iran, wherein the U.S. played a central role in the [overthrow](#) of Iran’s popular Prime Minister, Mohammad Mosaddegh, after he dared to nationalize Iranian oil for the Iranian people. This system of exploitation lived on in the U.S.-backed [mass murder](#) of one million suspected leftists in Indonesia. It lived on every time that the United States, or any other country, treated Muslim lives — or rights, or liberties — as expendable in the pursuit of U.S. wealth and power.

Anti-Muslim Oppression and the Endless War Era

Following the tragic September 11th attacks, there was an immediate and dramatic [spike](#) in hate crimes against Muslims, and those perceived as Muslim, within the United States. These were not just individual, disconnected occurrences of “hate” — they were a reflection of age-old prejudices and worse things to come. U.S. political leadership set and [tended to](#) a fire in which public violence was [enabled](#), and then repeated on a grand scale by the state itself. From the military invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, to the perpetration of mass and indiscriminate drone warfare across the globe, and the establishment of a worldwide carceral system of kidnap, indefinite detention, and torture — evident in Guantanamo Bay Prison in Cuba and Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq — the list of horrors is long.

To power the war machine, innocent human beings are sacrificed and the “enemy” is produced. Not only does dehumanization allow for incessant violence, but it also justifies a patronizing, white supremacist “saviorism.” As a result, violence committed against Muslim people is no longer even seen as violence. Instead, we are told that our bombs are benevolent and that our wars are for liberation.

Islamophobia Abroad, Islamophobia at Home

Along with this anti-Muslim foreign policy agenda came its inevitable counterpart, the systematic discrimination against Muslim communities at home. In the wake of September 11th, Muslim Americans became Muslims in America — no longer treated as a part of the nation, if they ever

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were, but as an enemy inside it. The Islamophobia abroad came home with the [mass surveillance](#) of Muslim communities, the baseless [designation](#) of mosques as “terrorism enterprises,” and, ultimately, the Muslim Ban(s), whose terrible costs were borne not only by Muslims in other nations, but also Muslims in the United States who were deprived of the ability to [see their families](#) and loved ones. These policies are not separable from the Islamophobia-fueled wars, coups, and sanctions that devastate millions of people — they are its natural byproducts.

The Case of Iran

To see this in action, it is worth taking a specific look at the case of Iran. Here, we are speaking not only of anti-Muslim discrimination broadly, but anti-Muslim discrimination as it intersects with the specific experiences and histories of Iranians and the Iranian diaspora. In my [recent report](#), I examine the systematic demonization of Iran, and by extension Iranian people and those of Iranian heritage, which is so prevalent in U.S. political discourse that it permeates American society and popular culture as well. Vilifying political rhetoric, such as Bush’s infamous “[axis of evil](#)” speech, jocular [calls for murder](#), and Hollywood images of hordes of faceless Iranians calling for America’s destruction are often the only images of Iran or Iranians that American people experience.

This widespread culture of dehumanization serves a political purpose: to paint people in Iran as inherently villainous, untrustworthy, and expendable, to cast complicated political challenges as a Manichean struggle between good and evil, and to divorce the contemporary political challenges from their history, and any U.S. culpability therein. This, in turn, becomes the ideological justification for an adversarial foreign policy defined by [illegal assassinations](#), the [unilateral rejection of diplomacy](#), repeated calls for, and [steps toward](#), war, and an utterly inhumane policy of suffocating sanctions that have served only to [starve everyday people](#) while undermining the struggles of those seeking democratic change under a brutal authoritarian government.

Fighting Back, Together

This is in no way unique to Muslims. Religions, cultures, and ethnic groups around the world face their own unique, but interrelated, dehumanization and oppression in service of U.S. empire. Nor is it limited to the United States. From the treatment of the Rohingya in Myanmar, to that of the Uyghur people in China, anti-Muslim oppression is a problem the world round (though these, too, are influenced in part by the [precedent](#) set by the United States.) The struggle against anti-Muslim oppression must therefore be global in scope, and arm-in-arm with our many siblings fighting their own forms of oppression. Legislation like [Rep. Omar’s bill](#) to combat worldwide Islamophobia, which recently passed the House, is an important step towards that end.

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Five years ago, the Trump administration enacted one of the most blatant, vile acts of anti-Muslim oppression in modern U.S. history. In the face of such a challenge, we mobilized. Ultimately, and while some important demands [remain to be met](#), the bans were overturned. But while this was a momentous victory, anti-Muslim oppression did not begin with Trump, and it surely did not end with him either. Islamophobia lives on, every day, in our rhetoric, our culture, and our foreign policy. To dismantle the war machine, we must dismantle the systems of oppression that fuel it.

WWW ON UKRAINE:

All eyes are [on Ukraine](#) this week, and if you're like us, you've been struggling to follow [the unfolding crisis](#) while wading through [all the pro-war content](#) out there. To that end, we're sharing a brief analysis as the situation develops:

We don't have all the answers, but we do know that there [isn't](#) a U.S. military solution to this crisis. We're concerned by the growing flow of weapons and troops to Ukraine and [agree with Reps. Lee and Jayapal](#) that the administration should focus on [de-escalation](#) and [diplomacy](#), rather than [sweeping sanctions](#) and [military build-up](#).

There's no shortage of analysis of today's crisis, and much of it understandably focuses on Russia's recent military buildup and U.S. arms shipments and troop deployments, yet any full accounting of how we got here must also grapple with the [decades-old predictions](#) that NATO expansion would inevitably lead to just such dangers.

Yet despite nearly endless media coverage, far too little attention is paid to the people likely to bear the brunt of any war. Rather than portraying world events as a chess game between presidents, we must remember that the fighting, dying, and suffering will be done by real people whose voices deserve to be heard now more than ever.

Finally, anytime a conflict includes the global extinction of all humanity through a nuclear war as one of its possible outcomes, we cannot lose sight that the fate of everyone may depend on preventing war. The need for creative and persistent diplomacy to be the focus of U.S. foreign policy has never been more clear.

BURIED LEDES

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5 years later, the terrible legacy of the Muslim Ban remains. Read [the stories](#) of those who've lost lifelong opportunities, who've lost loved ones, who've lost moments...those whose lives have been forever changed.

A better future is possible; in fact, it's necessary. Reps. Barbara Lee and Pramila Jayapal's [vision](#) for a foreign for the people, **the Foreign Policy for the 21st Century Resolution, could be our better way forward.**

In a moment of environmental justice, the Intertribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council, composed of 10 Native American tribes, has been granted [land back](#) in California. The council will be responsible for the land's recovery, restoration, and protection.

Refugees within Libya have organized and mobilized into a resistance movement. Their [manifesto](#) calls for: evacuation to safe lands, an end to coast guard interceptions, the closure of detention centers...to name a few.

War has many consequences; the theft and trafficking of art happens to be one of them. This week, **the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston [returned](#) a piece of art stolen in the aftermath of WWII to the descendants of Ferenc Chorin, a Jewish art collector.**

We couldn't have said it better than Shuaib Almosawa and Sarah Leah Whitson [already did](#): **"The Biden administration could have ended the brutal war in Yemen. It's now making it worse."**

Will history repeat itself in the third round of 2020? Attempting to prevent vaccine inequity in a new form, **Public Citizen recently [pushed](#) Pfizer to sell more COVID pills (Pazlovid) to developing nations across the globe.**

And finally, did you know that [the birds](#) work for the bourgeoisie? Wait, actually, nevermind - [the dolphins](#) work for the military.