



The **GLOBAL DAY OF ACTION AND PRAYER FOR SYRIA** will be held on September 21. In preparation we have asked guest experts to contribute essays that help our understanding of “the things that make for peace.” We hope these will help in our understanding of an alternative vision of peace with justice and practical peace-making strategies that can stand as alternatives to the war and violence that is being perpetuated in Syria. This is the fifth and final in this series of background essays.

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Syria Global Day of Action and Prayer: September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016

## **ISLAMOPHOBIA, THE UNITED STATES, AND REFUGEES**

By Susan Smith, Community Liaison for the Muslim Peace Fellowship and Community of Living Traditions

Islamophobia, or fear-mongering based on anti-Muslim hate, is a prevailing characteristic of current US culture. Its impact is devastating, as significant portions of the public are moved to embrace an exclusivist worldview that undermines a self-professed just, tolerant, loving and pluralistic society.

Domestically, the rise of Islamophobia has resulted in the creation of a condoned underclass and in a surge of violent crimes against Muslims and those profiled as Muslim. Internationally, it manifests as a foreign policy that rationalizes a “War on Terror” through the world’s largest military and defense budget, belligerence and military occupation, neocolonialism, the establishment of client regimes, and proxy wars. The compounded result of US belligerence against Islamic countries has been the deaths of millions of Muslims and mounting refugee crisis of unfathomable proportions.



While the refugee crisis is an unintended and unexpected burden shouldered by many Western nations, the manufacture of Islamophobia for public consumption is deliberate and strategic, according to the Center for Race and Gender at the University of California, Berkeley, which offers this definition:

“Islamophobia is a contrived fear or prejudice fomented by the existing Eurocentric and Orientalist global power structure. It is directed at a perceived or real Muslim threat through the maintenance and extension of existing disparities in economic, political, social and cultural relations, while rationalizing the necessity to deploy violence as a tool to achieve ‘civilizational rehab’ of the target communities. Islamophobia reintroduces and reaffirms a global racial structure through which resource distribution disparities are maintained and extended.”<sup>1</sup>

Key nations impacted by Islamophobia include Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Palestine and Syria - - countries generating the world’s most refugees. Yet, according to Dr. Arun Kundnani, an expert on terrorism, race and culture at New York University, many Americans don’t see the causal and cyclical relationship between the “War on Terror” and rise and spread of terrorism. He points to US-led wars in the Middle East as catalytic in the rise of violent extremist groups and quasi-states, such as the so-called Islamic State or Daesh. The wrath of extremists in Syria, along with the brutality of the Assad regime (and proxy wars engaged in by the US, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and others), has unleashed 4.8 million refugees and 8.7 million internally displaced persons.

Moreover, the US too often violates the United Nations Charter, which pronounces that member states shall “refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state” (Article 2, Paragraph 4). In the past 15 years, US hypermilitarism has had devastating effects on numerous majority-Muslim nations, including Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan, Libya, Mali and Syria, whose populations have endured surface-to-air missiles, carpet bombs, boots-on-the-ground, drones, Black Ops, and other means of modern warfare. Most tragic perhaps is Iraq, where an estimated one million perished in a 10-year period as a result of the US-led war, according to a 2015 report of the Nobel Prize-winning group, Physicians for Social Responsibility.<sup>2</sup> UN figures show as many as half a million Iraqi civilians,

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<sup>1</sup> See: <http://crg.berkeley.edu/content/islamophobia/defining-islamophobia>

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.psr.org/assets/pdfs/body-count.pdf>

most of whom were children, died as a result of brutal sanctions championed by the US in the UN Security Council.

Meanwhile, the US public writ large does not own itself as a belligerent unchecked superpower, but rather an exemplary and coveted “city on a hill” that embraces religious diversity, lauds freedom, and defends liberty. In order for the US to condone violence as a tool to achieve “civilizational rehabilitation” of target Islamic countries, its citizens need to identify Muslim nations and communities as a threat to American values. Hence, according to Kundnani, in spite of – and because of – the atrocities committed by the United States with taxpayer dollars, Islamophobia is manufactured as “a ‘lay ideology’ that offers an everyday ‘common sense’ explanatory framework for making sense of mediated crisis events (such as terror attacks) in ways that disavow those events’ political meanings (rooted in empire, racism and resistance) and ... instead explain them as products of reified ‘Muslimness’.”<sup>3</sup>

Islamophobia then, as a lay ideology of the US government, hearkens of racist and xenophobic precedents and policies targeting Native American, Black, Catholic, Jewish, Japanese and Latino communities. The strategy: malign and vilify people of a minority race or faith by playing upon social, economic and political frustrations; engender fear, loathing and cognitive dissonance as civil liberties are lost to domestic and foreign policies. Hence, the trope of the radicalized Muslim -- and fear cultivated in the hearts and minds of the American psyche – manifest in prevailing governmental systems, structures and apparatuses as media, think tanks, academia, and the non-profit industrial complex institutionalize a domestic war on terror. This in turn garners public support for the Department of Homeland Security’s Countering Violent Extremism program, which too often quashes the 4th Amendment of the US Constitution and sanctions Muslim surveillance, infiltration, entrapment, imprisonment and deportation.

Islamophobia has become an internalized, articulated and attitudinal norm: headline news as the Republican presidential nominee ratchets up support for surveilling Muslims, closing mosques, and banning refugees from Muslim countries. Meanwhile, at the Democratic National Convention, in the midst of four days of inclusive rhetoric, the inclusion of Muslims was limited to showcasing the parents of a Purple Heart soldier fallen in Iraq. Also, in classic example of dog-whistle politics, former President Bill Clinton made an insulting appeal to the

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<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.kundnani.org/draft-paper-on-islamophobia-as-lay-ideology-of-us-led-empire>

Muslim community. He said: “If you’re a Muslim and you love America and freedom and you hate terror, stay here and help us win and make a future together, we want you.” Implicit in that statement are a number of erroneous and Islamophobic messages about Muslim Americans, including: 1) They don’t necessarily love their country; 2) They must prove they love the US and freedom and hate terror (by voting for Hillary); 3) They must give up their citizenship and live elsewhere if they don’t; 4) They are not indigenous (when in fact the history of Muslims in America goes back 400 years and it is estimated that one-third of African slaves were Muslim); 5) They must join the “War on Terror” (which defacto and amorously in today’s climate of Islamophobia targets themselves); and 6) “A future together” is one in which they must clarify and qualify their Muslim identity.

While wars against Islam and Islamic countries by definition hurt Muslims, they also hurt those in Western countries that propagate them: first, by inflicting moral injury and cognitive dissonance transgressing deeply held ethics, beliefs and values, such as universal human rights and nonviolence; and second, by generating an ever-widening cycle of violence. According to Kundnani, “Islamophobia involves an ideological displacement of political antagonisms onto the plane of culture, where they can be explained in terms of the fixed nature of the ‘Other’.” Projection in the psychoanalytic sense permits racist and imperialist violence otherwise not tolerated by liberal society, and upon which militarism and neocolonialism depend. The result is what Kundnani refers to as a “constant feedback loop of unintended consequences” perpetuating cycles of violence and retaliation, oppression and victimization, acute and intergenerational trauma, and the destruction of families, societies, humanity and the planet.

We can stop the cycle of war and terrorism – and our own inevitable self-destruction -- through interfaith work, grassroots-movement building and militant nonviolent civil disobedience that disrupts military machinations, like the production and use of lethal drones and the new B81 Model 12 mini atomic bomb flight tested in Nevada last year.<sup>4</sup> We can elect and hold accountable government officials who champion universal human rights and the establishment of an equitable global partnership for peace, justice and development at home and abroad. We can abdicate our nation’s abused privilege as a Permanent Member of the Security Council with veto power, or use it to implement one yardstick of

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<sup>4</sup> See: [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/12/science/as-us-modernizes-nuclear-weapons-smaller-leaves-some-uneasy.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/12/science/as-us-modernizes-nuclear-weapons-smaller-leaves-some-uneasy.html?_r=0)

peace and justice for all. As people of love and faith, we must mobilize against Islamophobia, bring an end to the destruction of Islamic countries by the US's military-industrial complex, and urge our federal, state and local government to welcome refugees.

***Here's how you can help:***

- Tell your elected officials that you support a more humane world and welcome the resettlement of refugees in your community. Say you support an immediate end to all bombing and other military actions that perpetuate the terrible war in Syria, and support a just peace approach that scales up delivery of food and medicine, trauma healing, restorative justice, unarmed civilian protection, and transformative dialogue with all stakeholders to build a sustainable just peace. You can endorse the interfaith [Call for an End to the War in Syria](#), which will be issued GDAPS Interfaith Prayer Service, Wednesday, September 21st 2016. To endorse, contact [GlobalDayforSyria@gmail.com](mailto:GlobalDayforSyria@gmail.com).
- Contact the [Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality](#) (WISE) for an Advocacy Toolkit to see how your faith-based or community based organization can combat Islamophobia and engage in meaningful interfaith peace building.
- Join the Fellowship of Reconciliation's national [#GiveRefugeesRest](#) campaign to end Islamophobia and welcome refugees.
- Participate in the [Islam, Social Justice, and Interreligious Engagement Program](#) (ISJIE) at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, which promotes academic and public education aimed at cultivating diverse Islamic responses to pressing social justice issues. It also seeks to generate innovative and informed discourse on topics, such as climate change, racism, religious pluralism, violence, poverty and economic inequality, incarceration, and gender and sexuality
- The [Muslim Peace Fellowship](#) (MPF) is the first Muslim organization specifically devoted to the theory and practice of Islamic nonviolence, and is a gathering of peace and justice-oriented Muslims of all backgrounds and friends of other faiths who are dedicated to making the beauty of Islam

evident in the world. Connect to learn about and participate in events Islamic nonviolence.

- Learn more about how to stand up to Islamophobia using resources from the [Council on American-Islamic Relations](#) (CAIR), a leading advocacy group dedicated to fighting stereotypes and defamation against Muslims, and the [Shoulder-to-Shoulder](#) campaign, an interfaith organization dedicated to ending anti-Muslim sentiment by strengthening the voice of freedom and peace.
- Apply your skills and resources to address the refugee crisis locally. For example, residents of New York's lower Hudson Valley can contact the **Westchester Refugee Task Force** ([westchesterrefugeetaskforce@gmail.com](mailto:westchesterrefugeetaskforce@gmail.com)) to see how to assist in the resettlement of 101 refugees in the county in the coming year. Go to the [RefugeesWelcome](#) campaign to share your stories and photos of how you are welcoming refugees into your areas, to discover how others are welcoming refugees, and to find resource for making refugees feel welcome in our communities.
- Donate to [Islamic Relief USA](#) , [UNHCR](#), [Karam Foundation](#) and other humanitarian relief organizations on the ground in Syria, Turkey, Jordan, Greece and elsewhere to provide urgent food and medical care, or to sponsor a Syrian orphan or refugee.

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## **How Can You Take Part in the GLOBAL DAY OF ACTION AND PRAYER FOR SYRIA?**

- Join the **GDAPS [Interfaith Prayer Service](#)** Wednesday, September 21st 2016, from 5-6:30 pm at the Community Church of NY at 40 East 35th Street in NYC. Use this [flyer](#) to promote the event and join us!
- Use the available [Toolkit of Resources](#) to plan a prayer service or other activity in your community in conjunction with the day.
- Your congregation, organization or community can endorse the interfaith [Call for an End to the War in Syria](#), which will be issued at a press conference prior to the service. To endorse, contact [GlobalDayforSyria@gmail.com](mailto:GlobalDayforSyria@gmail.com).
- Like and follow GDAPS us on social media at [Facebook.com/GlobalDayForSyria](https://www.facebook.com/GlobalDayForSyria) or using [#GlobalDayForSyria](#), [#pray4syria](#), and [#peace4syria](#).

### **Current co-sponsors:**

[Association of Trauma Outreach and Prevention \(ATOP\) Meaningfulworld](#) | [Buddhist Council of New York](#) | [Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America ~ Bautistas por la Paz](#) | [The Center and Library for the Bible and Social Justice](#) | [Colomban Center for Advocacy and Outreach](#) | [Community of Living Traditions at Stony Point Center](#) | [Conference of Major Superiors of Men](#) | [Disciples Peace Fellowship](#) | [Fellowship of Reconciliation](#) | [Franciscan Action Network](#) | [Franciscan Peace Center](#) | [Global Ministries of the Christian Church \(Disciples of Christ\) and United Church of Christ](#) | [Interfaith Center of New York](#) | [JPIC Committee, Passionists of North America](#) | [Kolot Chayeinu/Voices of Our Lives](#) | [Leadership Conference of Women Religious](#) | [Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns](#) | [Mennonite Central Committee U.S.](#) | [Muslim Peace Fellowship](#) | [Pax Christi International](#) | [Pax Christi USA](#) | [Pax Christi Long Island](#) | [Presbyterian Church \(USA\)](#) | [Presbyterian Peace Fellowship](#) | [Refugee & Immigration Ministries, Christian Church \(Disciples of Christ\)](#) | [Syria Lebanon Partnership Network](#) | [United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries](#) | [United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society](#)