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The 'new' rhetoric of Islamophobia

Islamophobes in and outside Congress are claiming that a mass 'radicalisation' of American Muslims is taking place

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New York City's former mayor, Ed Koch, has taken time off from his new career as a film critic to offer a valentine to Rep. Peter King (R-NY), the new chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, for scheduling hearings on the dangers posed by Muslim Americans.

Koch's support for King is not surprising. Koch has always been open about his contempt for Arabs and Muslims and his belief that a war of civilisations is now in progress between Muslims and everyone else. He recently wrote:

For me, the question is this: will the secular Western civilisation shared by America and Europe, which allows us to enjoy life and its creature comforts, still be standing at the end of that war? Or will *radical* Islam, with an aggressive culture that treasures martyrdom and death over life, prevail.... [italics mine]

For years, Koch, King and others who share their anti-Muslim views hid behind that word: "radical". They said that they have no problem with Muslims as people or Islam as a religion. It is only "radical Islam" or "Islamists" that they can't abide.

Lately that caveat has been thrown to the winds. It is now clear that for Islamophobes (actually Islamohaters), "radical" Islam is just Islam. And "radical" Muslims are just Muslims.

A powerful example was recently offered by HBO commentator Bill Maher. Maher said in October that he was "[alarmed](#)" after reading that the most common name among newborns in the United Kingdom in 2009 was Muhammad.

Am I a racist to feel that I'm alarmed by that? Because I am. And it's not because of the race, it's 'cause of the religion. I don't have to apologise, do I, for not wanting the Western world to be taken over by Islam in 300 years?

He then added: "I should be alarmed and I don't apologise for it." (After all, those baby Muhammads will grow up to be adult Muhammads).

Marty Peretz, former editor of The New Republic, did apologise, in a half-hearted way, [for writing](#) during the "Ground Zero mosque" controversy that American Muslims should not be protected by the Constitution.

He had written that Muslims simply are not "worthy of the privileges of the First Amendment which I have in my gut the sense that they will abuse."

His subsequent [apology](#) was so weak, and his record of race-baiting was so long and vitriolic that [Peretz was forced out by The New Republic](#) and quickly hotfooted it out of the United States for Israel where he told [New York](#) magazine last month that he could not possibly be a bigot.

[H]e mentioned two close, personal black friends, one who is "so fucking smart," and then a third, a black student whom he had plucked from Harvard and made the circulation director of The New Republic. "I hired Muslims - I hired Fareed Zakaria," he added.

Well, okay then.

Then there is David Harris, president of the American Jewish Committee. Under his leadership, the American Jewish Committee issued a study "proving" that, contrary to the commonly used estimate of six million American Muslims, [the correct number is 2.8 million](#).

And why is Harris worried about Muslim population estimates?

"Six million has a special resonance," Harris wrote in a May 21 article in Jerusalem Report magazine. "It would mean that Muslims outnumber Jews in the US and it would buttress calls for a redefinition of America's heritage as 'Judeo-Christian-Muslim,' a stated goal of some Muslim leaders."

That is some scary "stated goal".

Even more, Harris is worried that the perception that there are as many Muslims as Jews would give Muslims additional political clout, leading Congress to occasionally actually pay attention to them (but unfortunately, that is not how it works).

And now along comes Peter King, who, as chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, is scheduling hearings on the "radicalisation of the American Muslim community". No, not on terrorists or terrorist sympathisers but on [Muslims in general](#).

It's not just people who are involved with the terrorists and extremists, it is people who are in mainstream Islam, leaders of mosques, leaders of Muslim organisations... So, it goes beyond the terrorists and the extremists and also includes those in what others call mainstream Muslim leadership.

King offers no evidence that the American Muslim community has become radicalised (perhaps because there is none).

No, drawing on what the New York Times [correctly calls](#) his usual "blather" and "bluster", King simply slanders an entire community. He will follow up with a bunch of kangaroo court hearings in which the usual bigots (Steve Emerson and/or Robert Spencer and/or Daniel Pipes and/or David Horowitz and/or Frank Gaffney, etc.) will show up to inform America that the Muslim family down the block might be al-Qaeda.

This isn't exactly McCarthyism but only in the sense that (1) there actually is a terrorist threat to the United States while the Communist threat was almost pure fabrication and (2) McCarthy never targeted a specific religious or ethnic group.

Of course, it makes sense for King to malign a particular segment of the population, rather than to focus on terrorism itself.

And that is because of Peter King's own record of sympathy for terrorism.

A 2005 [profile of King](#) by the conservative New York Sun told the story of King's long and deep involvement with the terrorist Irish Republican Army (IRA) and, even more damning, his support for Irish Northern Aid (NORAI), a US-based group accused of funnelling guns and money to the IRA. According to the Sun:

Mr. King's support for the IRA was unequivocal. In 1982, for instance, he told a pro-IRA rally in Nassau County: "We must pledge ourselves to support those brave men and women who this very moment are carrying forth the struggle against British imperialism in the streets of Belfast and Derry."

King was defending the IRA while it was engaged in serious violence.

[T]he IRA took its campaign to Britain - where London's financial district was twice devastated by bombs - and to mainland Europe, where British NATO bases were frequently targeted. The IRA nearly killed Prime Minister Thatcher and her cabinet with a bomb in 1984, and it assassinated prominent British politicians and members of the royal family.

King's support for the IRA was so outspoken that "[b]y the mid-1980s, the authorities on both sides of the Atlantic were openly hostile to Mr. King. On one occasion, a judge threw him out of

a Belfast courtroom during the murder trial of IRA men because, in the judge's view, 'he was an obvious collaborator with the IRA.' When he attended other trials, the police singled him out for thorough body searches."

In 1984, "the Secret Service listed him as a threat when President Reagan made a trip to Nassau County to watch a Special Olympics event."

Fortunately, in the 1980s, there was no headline-seeking House chairman to investigate the entire Irish-American community because of the activities of Peter King and his friends. After all, who could seriously suggest demonising a community of millions of law-abiding citizens because of the actions of a few terrorist sympathisers? NORAIID and other IRA-supporting groups were, quite properly, investigated. Not a whole population.

But now here is Peter King determined to find terrorism-supporters under every Muslim bed. Better, he should look in the mirror.