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Gulf News: Disquieting Trends Are a Wake-Up Call.

Linda S. Heard, Special to Gulf News
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Disquieting trends are a wake-up call -->As though a recent survey, conducted by Cornell University, indicating that almost half of America believes the civil liberties of Muslim Americans should be restricted, wasn't worrying enough, 40 Muslim US citizens, returning from an Islamic conference in Canada, were recently interrogated and forced to undergo fingerprinting at the border.

The Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) says the incident is "a disturbing example of religious profiling that would have a chilling effect on the constitutional rights of American Muslims", especially as the group was reportedly told by US security officials "you have no rights" citing "orders from above".

Daniel Pipes, described by the prestigious Wall Street Journal as "an authoritative commentator on the Middle East", is one of the cheerleaders of this bigoted movement, which includes Don Imus of MSNBC, the Arab-American editor of Worldnetdaily Joseph Farah, columnist Ann Coulter and a host of talking heads regularly recycled by Fox News.

Not sacrosanct

In a recent column, Pipes says he was "encouraged" by the Cornell survey and supports the contention of his fellow right-wing columnist Michelle Malkin that "civil liberties are not sacrosanct".

Pipes defends Malkin's argument that the United States was right to detain American citizens of Japanese ethnicity in internment camps during the Second World War, for which the government has since apologised, and quotes his paranoid co-ideologue as saying such racial profiling when applied to Muslims beats "being incinerated at your office desk by a flaming hijacked plane".

As to the racial profiling of American Muslims returning home, Pipes writes on his website, "Kudos to the American border agency, now known as US Customs and Border Protection", for its courage a comment squeezed between a lambasting of CAIR and a "pot calling the kettle black" gloat over the assertion that "the Middle East explodes with obesity".

The latest news, which could impact non-American Muslims, looks even bleaker. Despite worldwide condemnation of the Guantanamo gulag, accusations of US government-sanctioned torture, and concerns of the American judiciary over its secretive tribunals, according to the Washington Post, the Bush administration is planning to detain suspects throughout their entire lifetimes without charge or trial in a specially built prison, dubbed "Camp 6".

The Post describes Camp 6 as a place for those who have no more intelligence to share and who will never appear before a tribunal. It quotes Bryan Whitman, a Pentagon spokesman, as saying, "Since global war on terror is a long-term effort, it makes sense for us to be looking at solutions for long-term problems".

The fact that the formerly supine mainstream US media is beginning to speak out against the dubious behaviour of elements within the American government provides a chink of light in the gloom. Both the Washington Post and the Boston Globe have exposed an American "ghost jet"

with the tail number N379P used to transport terror suspects to countries which aren't squeamish when it comes to the use of archaic and brutal torture techniques.

Unavailable details

CEOs of Premier Executive Transport Services, the plane's former corporate owner, notes the Post, all possess social security numbers strangely issued after 1998, while details of the credit worthiness of both owners and the company itself are unavailable.

This story was taken one step further by Mike Rogoway writing in an Oregon newspaper. He asks: "Just who is Leonard Thomas Bayard?" of Bayard Foreign Marketing LLC, the jet's elusive new owner.

They seek him here, they seek him there but as Rogoway explains even determined corps of Internet bloggers have failed to dig up anything on him, adding "Somehow Bayard avoided the kinds of public record lists that include people who hold driver's licences, own land, are registered to vote, have been married, divorced, killed or convicted".

Reports by former CIA operatives indicate that both the former corporate owner and current owner of the jet are phantom CIA front companies. Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has previously admitted to the existence of "ghost detainees", whose names were deliberately omitted from official lists and obscured from the Red Cross.

While graphic reports of America's homegrown torture techniques abound, one is left to wonder why the administration bothers to pay others to do its dirty work.

According to last Sunday's Observer, British lawyer Clive Stafford-Smith was told during a long awaited visit to Guantanamo of the use of "strappado", a barbaric Latin-American torture technique.

One of Stafford-Smith's clients said he was thus punished for reciting the Holy Quran during a period of mandatory silence. Another reported suffering physical and sexual abuse on the lines of Abu Ghraib. FBI memos and emails, released under the US Freedom of Information Act, back up these claims and cite witness accounts of detainees chained without food, water and toilet facilities for up to 24 hours.

Almost all America's detainees are Muslims and it is Muslims who are being racially profiled and their countries invaded and intimidated.

Yet despite this disturbing fact, certain Muslim states are allegedly complicit in torturing detainees on America's behalf. A few of those same countries shamefully host American bases even as their neighbours, in particular Iran and Syria, are being threatened.

Faced with this growing bigotry against their own surely it is time for Muslim countries to settle their squabbles once and for all and stand up to be counted. The alternative would be nothing less than an unconscionable betrayal of all their citizens hold dear, not least in a worst case scenario their very life and liberty.

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