



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on March 18, 2011

Jefferson and Madison and Muslim Terrorists: How Would Peter King Judge Their Approach?

The angle of the piece was to compare and contrast the congressional hearings into the radicalization of Islam convened by Representative Peter King (R-N.Y.). In his own words as published on his congressional website, Congressman King provided the following justifications for conducting such an unusual investigation (officially styled [“The Extent of Radicalization in the American Muslim Community and that Community's Response”](#)):



Today's hearing will be the first in a series of hearings dealing with the critical issue of the radicalization of Muslim-Americans.?? I am well aware that the announcement of these hearings has generated considerable controversy and opposition. Some of this opposition — such as from my colleague and friend Mr. Ellison has been measured and thoughtful. Other opposition — both from special interest groups and the media has ranged from disbelief to paroxysms of rage and hysteria.?? Let me make it clear today that I remain convinced that these hearings must go forward. And they will. To back down would be a craven surrender to political correctness and an abdication of what I believe to be the main responsibility of this committee — to protect America from a terrorist attack.?? Despite what passes for conventional wisdom in certain circles, there is nothing radical or un-American in holding these hearings. Indeed, Congressional investigation of Muslim American radicalization is the logical response to the repeated and urgent warnings which the Obama



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Administration has been making in recent months.?? One month ago Secretary Napolitano testified before this Committee and said that the threat level today is as high as it has been since September 11th because of increased radicalization in our country.??There is no equivalency of threat between al Qaeda and neo-Nazis, environmental extremists or other isolated madmen. Only al Qaeda and its Islamist affiliates in this country are part of an international threat to our nation. Indeed by the Justice Department's own record not one terror related case in the last two years involved neo-Nazis, environmental extremists, militias or anti-war groups.?? To combat this threat, moderate leadership must emerge from the Muslim community.

This means that responsible Muslim-American leaders must reject discredited groups such as CAIR — The Committee on Islamic-American Relations which was named as an unindicted co-conspirator in the terrorist financing case involving the Holyland Foundation.

Al Qaeda realizes that the measures we have put in place over the past 9 ½ years make it very difficult to launch a large scale attack against the homeland from outside the country which is why they have altered their strategy and are recruiting and using people living legally in the United States.??As we approach the 10-year anniversary of the September 11th attacks, we cannot allow the memories of that tragic day to fade away. We must remember that in the days immediately following the attack, we are all united in our dedication to fight back against Al Qaeda and its ideology.??Today, we must be fully aware that homegrown radicalization is part of al Qaeda's strategy to continue attacking the United States. Al Qaeda is actively targeting the American Muslim Community for recruitment.

In his letter and during the hearings (covered ably by *The New American* [here](#)), Congressman King assumes that there is something fundamentally awry in the approach taken by many Muslims to the tenets of their Islamic faith. He suggests that there is a systematic movement to "radicalize" mainstream Muslims and convert them into a strain of Islam that would "continue attacking the United States."

There is, among many self-described conservatives, a fear that radical Islamic imams are preaching a sermon that encourages adherents to first, hew more rigidly to a more "orthodox" version of Islam; and second, to seek the enshrinement of Sharia law into the common and codified law of the United States. Together, the profession of these two principles will create a stronger, more devout Muslim community, as well as open America for a greater evangelical mission whose goal is the ordaining of "homegrown



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terrorists” able to serve as weapons in the hands of a wrathful God.

The attempt by Congressman King and his fellows to convince Americans that our laws are being subjugated to the tenets of Sharia law is laughable. This will be dealt with shortly. As for his extraordinarily narrow focus on Muslims (and American Muslims in particular) as a threat to the security of the United States, there are lessons to be learned from the experience of President Thomas Jefferson and his countryman and Secretary of State James Madison in dealing with another band of Islamic terrorists — the Barbary Coast Pirates.

Jefferson and Madison oversaw our young Republic’s battle against these tide-borne terrorists during a series of skirmishes known as the [Tripolitan War](#) (so called because of the location of the pirates’ home base in Tripoli, Libya. The principle issue in this engagement was the Barbary pirates’ demand that American vessels sailing in the Mediterranean Sea pay them tribute for the right to conduct business with merchants along the coasts of that body of water.

The relevance of this conflict is set forth succinctly by Burstein and Isenberg:

For years, the Barbary States of North Africa — Algiers, Tunis, Morocco and Tripoli — had been attacking vessels in the Mediterranean, capturing crews and holding them hostage until a ransom was paid. When the U.S. balked at paying tribute, the pasha (chief) of Tripoli declared war. Neither Madison nor Jefferson shied from using force to teach the tyrants a lesson, illustrating the young nation’s pride.

Just as significantly, though, the Jefferson administration was careful not to turn the conflict into a holy war. Madison instructed the U.S. consul in Algiers to exhibit "universal toleration in matters of religion." When Pope Pius VI learned of America’s naval triumph on the shores of Tripoli, he praised the administration for its defense of Christianity. Madison and Jefferson flatly rejected the pope’s perspective.... Madison and Jefferson appreciated that their war was about the use of power in the national interest, and nothing else. They were pragmatic politicians, not zealots.

The wisdom in the rational approach by Jefferson and Madison is lost on Representative King. The good Congressman is one of the bloc of Republicans who often cite the Founding Fathers in their quest to wrap their own actions in the impenetrable cloak of “the intent of the Founders.” In this instance, King has mistaken the spirit and sagacity of the men he probably sincerely seeks to emulate.

One of the primary motives for the which Congressman King called these hearings was to root out, expose, and then eradicate “hysteria” being fomented by designing Muslim clerics acting as recruiters in the war on the West. Sadly, it is King himself who is fanning the flames of intolerance.

Again, Professors Burstein and Isenberg on the subject:

Congressman King overlooks what is the very essence of James Madison’s thinking: religious discrimination as the most dangerous threat to liberty. "Whilst we assert for ourselves a freedom to embrace, to profess, and to observe a religion which we believe to be of divine origin," he wrote in his bold "Memorial and Remonstrance" of 1784, "we cannot deny an equal freedom to those whose minds have not yet yielded to the evidence which has convinced us...."

Freedom of conscience, then under consideration in Williamsburg, was the subject on which they first saw eye to eye; the two young legislators were impelled toward collaboration in order to change the laws and disestablish the Anglican Church. Their liberal advocacy opened the way for Baptists, Methodists, Quakers and others to extend their reach.



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A few months ago, I wrote [an article](#) on James Madison's "Memorial and Remonstrance," a paper written to encourage an atmosphere not only of religious tolerance, but of official recognition of the liberty of conscience. A few words from that article:

Madison saw any attempt to use the sword as a weapon of conversion to be "an unhallowed perversion of the means of salvation." Men who disagree with the established religion will be kept from ever embracing its saving ordinances because they will be constant witnesses of the blood and force used in "proving" its divinity and they will thereby be blinded to the grace, mercy, and love that form its purest expression.

Another problem that results from the use of civil power to enforce religious practices is the disquieting of society and the disharmony among the congregants of the various sects. The prince would naturally prefer those of his own faith and those of other faiths would feel threatened and ill at ease in such a state. Of course, as is the case with all men, the prince may change his religious views and if the state and the church be indistinguishable, there would be no one left safe from the threat of the sword. Madison reminded the Virginia legislators, "torrents of blood have been spilt in the old world, by vain attempts of the secular arm to extinguish religious discord by proscribing all difference in religious opinion." History taught Madison and Locke that societal peace and harmony waned when the civil authority attempted to shoulder the ecclesiastical mantle.

Another way of expressing the same sentiment was written by Thomas Jefferson and quoted in the Burstein/Isenberg article:

"It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg."

And a final example from the article of the dissonance between Peter Kings's veneration of the Founders and his emulation thereof:

During the War of 1812, when the enemy ultimately set fire to the Capitol, the president's house and other government buildings, Madison would not sacrifice his principles. Though Secretary of State James Monroe urged him to curb freedom of speech and enforce sedition prosecutions (there was considerable pro-British sentiment), he would not do so. Also, as president, he refused to charter an Episcopal church in Alexandria, Va., because, he said, the national government should take no "cognizance" of religion.

And:

Demagogic displays, the exploitation of the vulnerabilities of minorities, gives only a false sense of security. Madison made this clear to his fellow Americans in 1784, when he declared that any official of the government who made himself a judge, or interpreter, of another's religious life not only revealed "an arrogant pretension," but was at the same time contradicting the teachings of Christianity, which "disavows a dependence on the powers of this world."

Finally, when it comes to the propagation and fostering of the precepts of Sharia law, there is no greater patron than the government of the United States of America itself.

Proof of our own government's complicity in the enshrinement of Sharia law is found in Article 2 of the Iraqi Constitution. That inculcating provision reads: "Islam is the official religion of the State and it is a fundamental source of legislation.... No law that contradicts the established provisions of Islam may be



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established.”

Who penned that indisputably pro-Sharia provision? Not some radical Iraqi Muslim mullah, but rather a committee overseen by the American-led, funded, and fueled Coalition Provisional Authority.

Our leaders, if their legitimate aim is to advance the cause of securing the perpetual peace and safety of the American people, should turn their attention away from marginalizing one segment of the American citizenry and toward the unwavering adherence to the strict limitations on power, the rights of states to be self-governing, and the ultimate sovereignty of “we, the people” as established by our own “[radical](#)” founding document, the Constitution.

Photo of Peter King: AP Images



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