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Film on "Radical Islam" Tied to Pro-Israel Groups

by Khody Akhavi

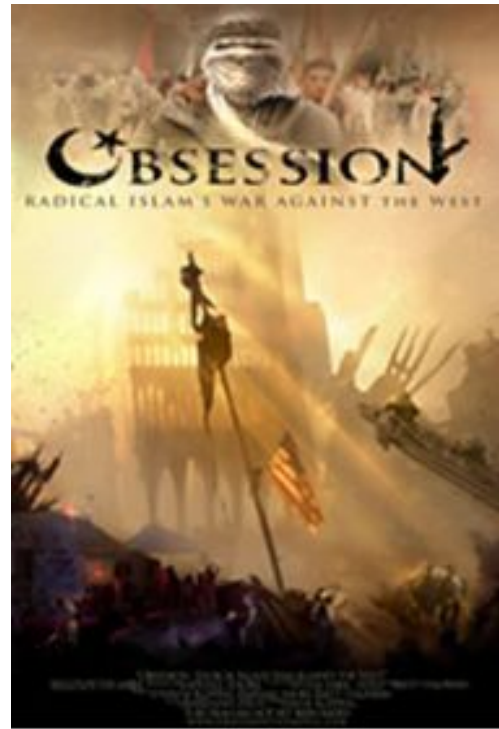
WASHINGTON - A controversial documentary on the threat of radical Islam, promoted by the two most-watched U.S. cable news networks, was marketed and supported in part by self-described "pro-Israel" groups, according to an IPS investigation.

Abbreviated versions and segments of "Obsession: Radical Islam's War Against the West" ran on FOX News and CNN, but neither station disclosed the film's connection to HonestReporting, a watchdog group that monitors the media for allegedly negative portrayals of Israel.

HonestReporting marketed "Obsession" but denies it produced or funded the project.

"We initially gave some guidance to the 'Obsession' staff," wrote Pesach Bensen, editor of [Mediabackspin.com](http://mediabackspin.com), the organization's weblog, in an email response to IPS. "We're thrilled to see it succeed beyond our wildest expectations."

When "Obsession" was released last year, news pundits and anchors on FOX and CNN praised the independent film for its candid look at Islamic militancy. FOX incorporated footage from the film into a one-hour special, which aired seven times in November 2006. CNN's right-wing pundit Glen Beck called it "one of the most important films of our time". Sean Hannity of FOX News described it as "shocking beyond belief".



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While such enthusiasm from right-wing talk show personalities comes as no surprise, mainstream cable news programs also appeared to accept, without question, the premise of the film, which explicitly compares the threat posed by radical Islam to that of Nazi Germany in the 1930s.

Consider, for example, CNN news anchor Kyra Phillips's exhortations during an adulatory interview in December 2006 with Raphael Shore, the film's producer: "I encourage everybody to see this movieà you definitely get an incredible education from watching this filmà The movie left many of us speechlessà We appreciate what you've done."

HonestReporting was founded in 2000 by British university students who objected to what they considered anti-Israel coverage by European media in response to the second Palestinian intifada.

There is no mention of HonestReporting's connection to "Obsession" on the film's website, www.obsessionthemovie.com. In an online "Ask the Filmmakers" segment on the FOX News website, Shore stated that he could not identify the film's funders for fear of retaliation by the "radicals" the filmmakers exposed.

Brian Gaffney, executive producer of the FOX News Documentary Unit,

declined to comment on whether HonestReporting's connection was disclosed to the audience, or whether FOX was aware of the organization's ideological perspective.

"There is no mistaking that this was a film with a clear point of view," Gaffney wrote in an email to IPS. "Its forceful case against Radical Islam spoke for itself.

In the case of CNN, which ran segments of the film in the context of a joint interview with Shore and cast member Nonie Darwish, it appears that producers were unaware of the connection.

"I was told that HonestReporting was not involved with this film," said CNN spokeswoman Megan Mahoney.

Any relation between HonestReporting and "Obsession" is also missing on the film's website, but the organization's name does appear at the end of the film's credits. In addition, a call for tax-deductible donations to help "launch" the film appeared on HonestReporting's website, promising a free DVD of "Obsession" upon release. Contributors of 250 dollars or more were promised a free copy of the book *"Israel: Life in the Shadow of Terror"*. An entry on [Mediabackspin.com](http://mediabackspin.com), the organization's weblog, also describes HonestReporting as a "proud partner" of the film.

"Obsession" features interviews with Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz, investigative journalist Steve Emerson, Itimar Marcus of Israel-based Palestinian Media Watch, and Daniel Pipes, a controversial scholar of medieval Islamic history whose website campus-watch.org sparked criticism in 2002 for its alleged McCarthyesque attacks on Middle East studies professors.

Its production credits include the Middle East Media Research Institute, or MEMRI, a translation service founded in 1998 by Col. Yigal Carmon, who spent more than 20 years in Israeli intelligence and later advised two Israeli prime ministers; and the Palestinian Media Watch, an Israeli group founded by Marcus, that monitors Palestinian news organizations for alleged anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic propaganda.

"Obsession", for all its fans, has engendered contentious debate on U.S. university campuses not only for its disquieting barrage of video footage culled from the Arab media, but also for the film's distribution network.

According to the New York Times, when a Middle East discussion group organized a screening at New York University earlier this year, distributors of the film required those in attendance to register at IsraelActivism.com, the official website of the Hasbara fellowships.

The program, also known as the Jerusalem fellowships, was started in 2001 by Aish Hatorah — an Orthodox Jewish outreach organization and yeshiva based in East Jerusalem — in conjunction with Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to its website, the group "educates and trains university students to be effective pro-Israel activists on their campuses" by providing its participants with "tools, resources and confidence to return to their campuses as leaders in the fight for Israel's image."

Aish Hatorah helped found HonestReporting. Rabbi Ephraim Shore, the president of HonestReporting, also helped found Hasbara.

According to the St. Louis Dispatch, a summer screening of "Obsession" in St. Louis was sponsored by the local branch of Aish Hatorah and featured a post-film discussion with Walid Shoebat, an ex-Palestine Liberation Organization militant who was interviewed in the film. In the summer of 2006, Shoebat, a convert to evangelical Christianity, also spoke at the "Night to Honor Israel," a three-day event presented by Pastor John Hagee's Christians United for Israel, a lobby group that aims to mobilize Christian Zionists as a political force, according to the San Antonio Express.

While watching the film, it becomes clear that the controversy surrounding "Obsession" has less to do with what it says about the threat of radical Islam, than how it presents the information. While the film contains disclaimers stating that "it's important to remember most Muslims are peaceful and do not support terror," critics argue that it makes little distinction between the religion of Islam and the political realities that inform terrorism.

"It's all part of that industry of Muslim bashers," said Ibrahim Hooper, a spokesman for the Council on American-Islamic Relations.

"The sentiment is there, you can see in the [1995] Oklahoma City bombing that it was originally seen as an act of Islamic terrorism," said Peter Hart of Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting. "It's almost a default position for the media, so you're going to have work like this received uncritically."

The Oklahoma City bombing, initially attributed by the mainstream media to Islamic terrorists, was actually perpetrated by right-wing extremists from the U. S. midwest.

The film's director, Wayne Kopping, argues that it aims to uncover the mixed messages propagated by radical Islamists in the Muslim world, who moderate their voices only when they speak in Western media outlets.<

"Children in the Arab world are... breastfed on a diet of hatred for the West. Not only that — the entire culture is permeated with it," said Kopping in a FOX interview. "The question is what are they [the spokespeople] saying in their own language, on their own TV stations to their own people. That's when you really hear what they think, and they call for jihad."

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1.

granfromwisconsin March 27th, 2007
1:36 pm

This is Muslim Bashing at its very worst !! I refuse to see CNN and Fox Networks, they are biased and should be ashamed of themselves.. This is spreading Hate ,and quite frankly enough already... I have a lot of Muslim friends and also have friends in the Middle East who are suffering at the hands of Biased Reporting and Israel I might add,, I WILL NOT be seeing this movie to see more hatred and falsehoods against the Muslim Community and the Middle East, This is a Outrage !!! I would recommend boycott of this Movie !! Also I might add, I was a supporter of so called Progressive Russ Feingold here in Wisconsin, Until that DAY, when Israel decided to bomb Lebannon, and HE and other Members of Congress decided to do

NOTHING and stand by while innocent children women, fathers, and grandparents and the such died a horrible death,!! I will continue to support the Palestine/ Muslim communities in thier fight against racism.. Myrna Ulrich- Cross Plains Wisconsin

2.

Ragdoll March 27th, 2007 2:19 pm

Remember when Colin Powell intervened to try to stop distribution of the Egyptian film based on the Protocols of Zion, aother infamous piece of propaganda? So where is Secretary Rice on "Obsessions?"

It is an outrage and far from being in the best interests of the Israeli people to allow this kind of distorted propaganda! Let's hope the moderates in Israel find their voices to cry out against this outrage too.

As to CNN how about organizing a zap out day now and then?

3.

[Jaded Prole](#) March 27th, 2007 3:35 pm

Another example that in many ways, Zionism is anti-semitic. It is tied inextricably to US imperialism.

4.

colleen March 27th, 2007 4:26 pm

Jeff Greenfield on CNN compared Barak Obama with Ahmadinejad.

They both wear similarly styled clothes. It was supposed to be "humorous" but of course it is not funny to compare a US presidential candidate with someone who denies the Holocaust.

CNN is as tainted as Fox is with bias imo. And I think they will try to eliminate Obama from the field unless he sucks up to right wing Jews. Our news is being influenced by people who have a very strong interest in preserving Israel. The news in other nations is showing some of the problems that ordinary Palestinians are facing because of Israeli policies.

I have no problem in protecting Israel.

I think that war is not going to be successful in helping protect Israel.

There are over one billion muslims and there are 14 million Jews. 40 % of all Jews world wide live in the US, which is about 6 million Jews or 2% of the US population. There are fewer Jews in Israel than in the US. Much of the debate about Israel is going on in the US among Jews here.

I have a friend who is imo right wing in his devotion to Israel. Israel can do no wrong and he supported the war on Lebanon. How do you convince someone like that that that war will make the situation worse. He lost aunts and uncles in the Holocaust. It is a form of hysteria and right wing films like "Obsession" encourage that hysteria.

Any time this kind of debate occurs, the right wing claims that the people who oppose them are anti-semites.

This kind of hysterical reaction is like watching someone committ suicide, because it is ridiculous to think that Israel can survive if they do not eventually find some accomodation with the large

muslim nations surrounding them.

5.

consider March 27th, 2007 4:37 pm

I have not seen the film and I'm sure it's not made to be fair and balanced but to stir up emotions. That said, if you ask people who have lived in the Middle East and who are immersed in the culture (ie read Arabic etc) they will confirm what is probably the gist of this film: that people, and especially young people are incited to hatred and terrorism on a daily basis. Ragdoll mentioned the Protocol of Zion (an early Zarist Russian fabrication of a supposed plot by "the Jews"). That kind of junk is believed by 90% of Muslims who are fed BS like that every day. I'm not denying the US' evil power politics in the region, or the machinations of the Israeli propaganda machine (which is a major player) but please: do face the reality. People in the middle east are being brainwashed every day, and their particular religion, Islam, lends itself to the cult of death and suicide murder unlike any other religion. When Buddhists go to the extreme they burn themselves. Muslims explode themselves and their children to kill as many innocent bystanders as possible with

very questionable logic about what political goals can be achieved by that.
Muslim bashing? I'm an atheist, if I lived in a Muslim country I'd have to fear for my life because that supposed religion of peace does not practice tolerance but submission or death. And all for a childish concept of a supposed higher being that gives not the slightest indication of existing.

6.

consider March 27th, 2007 4:40 pm

PS: Forgot to say that one of the premier people to read or ask about the reality of Muslim indoctrination is none other than Robert Fisk who has been living in Lebanon for I think now 28 years. He's hated by Neocons and Arab people and heads of states alike because he tells it as it is, regardless of whom he pisses off. It surprises me he's still alive after all these years.

7.

Nietzsche March 27th, 2007 7:19 pm

Neither Christians nor Jews have any moral high ground from which to lecture Islam.

8.

suhail_shafi March 27th, 2007 7:55 pm

If racist programs like Glenn Beck that openly call for Muslim Americans to be deported en masse to concentration camps and the hate sermons of the likes of Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell were to be translated into Arabic and shown on Arab TV there can be no question at all that most Arabs would eventually become convinced that the US is a nation of racist right wingers and religious fanatics.

But here's the rub - if the inflammatory Islamophobia and rabidly racist attitudes towards Arabs that you see on the Glenn Beck show, the Club 700 or Fox News can all be condoned in the name of freedom of expression, then by the same token even the hateful language that is amplified and magnified in right wing websites like MEMRI. Why is it that even the most provocative of hate language in the Western world is condoned in the name of free speech and even the mildest criticism by Arabs of the West's policies is seen as a sign of extremism? Could it be that freedom of expression has been monopolised by the West?

I have a theory - Americans believe in free speech as long as it does not offend them or go against what they believe in - in this respect they are similar to the Muslim fanatics whose ideology they see as the pole opposite of what they stand for. Ironic but true.

9.

suhail_shafi March 27th, 2007 7:59 pm

By the way, has anyone bothered to ask yet how Walid Shoebat, an openly self confessed terrorist who is known to have been involved in a slew of terrorist acts managed to come to the US and become a US citizen ? It is a well kept secret that people involved in terrorist and subversive actions are not supposed to be issued US visas, let alone US passports !

Could it be that terrorists who switch sides are more favoured than others ? Who knows, by that yardstick, Osama might someday become an American !

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