

Fox News “Terrorism Expert” claims Birmingham is a “Muslim-only City”: The Sorry Record of a Muslim-Basher

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Image: “Terrorism expert” Steve Emerson is interviewed by Jeanine Pirro on Fox News where he claimed that Muslims have terrorized non-Muslims into staying out of Birmingham, Great Britain’s second-largest city. (From the UK Guardian)

Supposed “terrorism expert” Steven Emerson has admitted to making a slur against British Muslims, [claiming](#) on Fox News that Birmingham, England, is now a “Muslim-only city” and that in parts of London “Muslim religious police ... beat and actually wound seriously anyone who doesn’t dress according to religious Muslim attire.”

Emerson was asserting that Muslim areas have become “no-go zones” for non-Muslims and cited as an example “actual cities like Birmingham that are totally Muslim, where non-Muslims just simply don’t go in.” Yet, Birmingham, Great Britain’s second-largest city of more than one million people, is nearly half Christian, with the Muslim population less than one-quarter and with significant numbers of Sikhs, Hindus, Jews and non-religious.

As Emerson’s Muslim-bashing remarks drew [criticism](#) from the media watchdog group FAIR and [ridicule](#) across the United Kingdom, he acknowledged that his “comments about Birmingham were totally in error” and vowed not to blame someone else for his slander.

“I do not intend to justify or mitigate my mistake by stating that I had relied on other sources because I should have been much more careful,” Emerson said in an apparent attempt to do exactly that, shift the blame to some unnamed source for supposedly misleading him.

That ploy – of palming off his falsehoods on others – is typical of Emerson when he gets caught in a deception. In the early 1990s, when Emerson was riding high as “an award-winning journalist” and took aim at me by falsely claiming that I had lied in a PBS documentary, he responded to my protest to his editors by threatening a lawsuit against me.

Only after I was able to prove that it was Emerson who was lying did he grudgingly back down and blamed one of his researchers for the falsehood. The context of that fabrication was Emerson’s attempt to debunk allegations that Ronald Reagan’s 1980 campaign had colluded with Iranian officials to sabotage President Jimmy Carter’s negotiations to free 52 American hostages then being held in Iran, a crisis that effectively sank Carter’s reelection.

For a PBS “Frontline” documentary on the controversy, I had noted that the Secret Service had released only redacted copies of its records regarding the whereabouts of then vice presidential candidate George H.W. Bush on days when he was alleged to have traveled secretly to Paris. Writing for The New Republic, Emerson claimed that he had received copies of the Secret Service records under a Freedom of Information Act request without any redactions, suggesting that I had lied.

After talking to the Secret Service and being told that Emerson’s records had redactions like everyone else’s – even Congress and federal prosecutors received redacted versions – I challenged Emerson’s account in letters to his editors, including one to CNN where he had been hired as an investigative reporter.

Emerson was subsequently dumped by CNN and I was promptly threatened by one of his law firms with a libel suit for having criticized him in letters to his editors. Apparently, I was supposed to apologize for saying that Emerson was lying when he claimed to have Bush’s unredacted Secret Service records.

Faced with this legal threat, I had to dig into my children’s college fund and hire a lawyer, who frankly seemed to doubt that the well-regarded Emerson could be in the wrong. My response was that if Emerson actually had the unredacted records, he could simply present them, but his lawyer said that would only be done in the midst of a costly trial.

As the abusive and threatening letters from Emerson’s lawyers mounted, I decided to submit a FOIA to the Secret Service for Emerson’s FOIA, i.e., I demanded exactly the same documents that the Secret Service had released to him. When those records arrived, they showed that Emerson indeed had been lying. His copies of the Secret Service records were redacted, just like those released to me and other investigators.

Finally, the threatened lawsuit went away, and Emerson was forced to admit in an interview with the media watchdog group FAIR that he never had the records he claimed. He blamed a research assistant, but never apologized for the bullying legal strategy designed to financially bleed a journalist (myself) into confirming a lie as the truth. [For more details, see [a report](#) in FAIR’s “Extra!,” November-December 1993.]

Since then, Emerson has amassed a checkered record as a “terrorism expert,” routinely blaming the wrong ethnic groups for various terrorism incidents. [For a brief recounting, see FAIR’s “[For Fox News’ Steve Emerson, Fact-checking Seems to Be a No-Go Zone.](#)”]

Muslim-Bashing Career

Most significantly, Emerson has made a lucrative career out of decrying Muslims. In a 2011 report, entitled “[Fear, Inc.](#),” by the Center for American Progress, he was identified as one of five “scholars” who act as “misinformation experts” to “generate the false facts and materials” that are then exploited by politicians and pundits to frighten Americans about the supposed threat posed by Muslims.

The report offered a rare glimpse into the right-wing propaganda network that has exploited America’s post-9/11 hysteria and transformed those fears into a powerful political movement to get millions of Christians and Jews to support legislation and policies that target Muslims and their communities.

But the historical significance of noting Emerson's role in this "Islamophobia network" is that he was revealed to be a propagandist willing to distort information for ideological ends, not the serious journalist that he successfully posed as during the 1980s and 1990s.

In more recent years, followers of Emerson's work have come to understand that he has very close ties to Israeli right-wingers in the Likud Party - and that his "journalism" often has reflected their political needs and interests.

However, in the 1990s, Emerson was amassing journalism awards for his work targeting American Muslims as a particularly dangerous lot - and he was raising large sums of money to support his work from sources, such as right-wing mogul Richard Mellon Scaife. Emerson's documentary, "Jihad in America," was broadcast by PBS.

Only gradually did a few brave reporters begin criticizing Emerson and his cozy ties to right-wing Israeli officials, including Israeli intelligence officers. Typically, Emerson would hit back by issuing legal threats from his vast stable of high-priced lawyers.

Emerson's use of lawyers to bully other journalists, which I had witnessed firsthand, became part of his modus operandi, as Nation reporter Robert I. Friedman discovered in 1995 after criticizing Emerson's "Jihad in America."

"Intellectual terrorism seems to be part of Emerson's standard repertoire," Friedman wrote. "So is his penchant for papering his critics with threatening lawyers' letters."

Friedman also reported that Emerson hosted right-wing Israeli intelligence officials when they were in Washington. "[Yigal] Carmon, who was Likud Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's adviser on terrorism, and [Yoram] Ettinger, who was Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu's man in the Israeli Embassy, stay in Emerson's apartment on their frequent visits to Washington," Friedman wrote.

In 1999, a [study of Emerson's history](#) by John F. Sugg for FAIR's magazine "Extra!" quoted an Associated Press reporter who had worked with Emerson on a project as saying of Emerson and Carmon: "I have no doubt these guys are working together."

The Jerusalem Post reported that Emerson has "close ties to Israeli intelligence," and "Victor Ostrovsky, who defected from Israel's Mossad intelligence agency and has written books disclosing its secrets, calls Emerson 'the horn' - because he trumpets Mossad claims," Sugg reported.

Hammering Away

Over time, Emerson grew notorious for his Islamophobia and his "investigative journalism" that hammered away at purported dangers from "radicalized" American Muslims. In 2010, Emerson went on a national radio program and claimed that Islamic cleric Feisal Abdul Rauf, an American citizen of New York, would likely not "survive" Emerson's disclosure of supposedly radical comments that Rauf made a half decade earlier.

Although acknowledging that his "investigation" was incomplete, Emerson offered the listeners to Bill Bennett's right-wing radio show "a little preview" of the allegedly offensive comments by Rauf, the cleric behind a planned community center in Lower Manhattan near the site of 9/11's "ground zero":

“We have found audiotapes of Imam Rauf defending Wahhabism, the puritanical version of Islam that governs Saudi Arabia; we have found him calling for the elimination of the state of Israel by claiming he wants a one-nation state meaning no more Jewish state; we found him defending [Osama] bin Laden violence.”

However, when Emerson’s Investigative Project on Terrorism (IPT) released [its evidence](#) several days later, it fell far short of Emerson’s lurid descriptions. Rauf actually made points that are shared by many mainstream analysts – and none of the excerpted comments involved “defending Wahhabism.”

As for Rauf “defending bin Laden violence,” Emerson apparently was referring to remarks that Rauf made to an audience in Australia in 2005 about the history of U.S. and Western mistreatment of people in the Middle East. “We tend to forget, in the West, that the United States has more Muslim blood on its hands than al-Qaeda has on its hands of innocent non-Muslims,” Rauf said.

“You may remember that the U.S.-led sanctions against Iraq led to the death of over half a million Iraqi children. This has been documented by the United Nations. And when Madeleine Albright, who has become a friend of mine over the last couple of years, when she was Secretary of State and was asked whether this was worth it, [she] said it was worth it.”

Emerson purported to “fact check” Rauf’s statement on the death toll from the Iraq sanctions by claiming “a report by the British government said at most only 50,000 deaths could be attributed to the sanctions, which were brought on by the actions by former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.”

What Emerson’s “fact check” ignored, however, was that Rauf was accurately recounting Leslie Stahl’s questioning of Albright on CBS “60 Minutes” in 1996. Emerson also left out the fact that United Nations studies did conclude that those U.S.-led sanctions caused the deaths of more than 500,000 Iraqi children under the age of five.

In the 1996 interview, Stahl told Albright regarding the sanctions, “We have heard that a half million children have died. I mean, that’s more children than died in Hiroshima. And, you know, is the price worth it?”

Albright responded, “I think this is a very hard choice, but the price – we think the price is worth it.”

Emerson didn’t identify the specific British report that contains the lower figure, although even that number – “only 50,000” – represented a stunning death toll and doesn’t contradict Rauf’s chief point, that U.S.-British actions have killed many innocent Muslims over the years.

Also, by 2005, when Rauf made his remarks in Australia, the United States and Great Britain had invaded and occupied Iraq, with a death toll spiraling from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands with some estimates of war-related deaths in Iraq exceeding one million.

Far from “defending bin Laden violence,” Rauf’s comments simply reflected the truth about

the indiscriminate killing inflicted on the Muslim world by U.S.-British military might over the years. Indeed, British imperialism in the region dates back several centuries, a point that Emerson also ignored. Other of Emerson's criticisms of Rauf were equally tendentious. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Islam Basher Claims to Unmask Cleric.](#)"]

In 2011, amid the furor over Rauf's project, Emerson took credit for helping to organize controversial hearings by Rep. Peter King, R-New York, on the alleged radicalization of domestic Muslims. Emerson boasted about his role but also lashed out at King for not including him on the witness list for his hearings. In a particularly bizarre letter to King, Emerson vowed to withhold further assistance as retaliation for the snub.

"I was even going to bring in a special guest today and a VERY informed and connected source, who could have been very useful, possibly even critical to your hearing, but he too will not attend unless I do," Emerson wrote. "You have caved in to the demands of radical Islamists in removing me as a witness."

In another weird twist, Emerson somehow envisioned himself as the victim of McCarthyism because he wasn't being allowed to go before the House Homeland Security Committee and accuse large segments of the American-Muslim community of being un-American. [[Politico, Jan. 19, 2011](#)]

Then, in summer of 2011, the Center for American Progress sponsored a report on Emerson and other Muslim-bashers. The context was the murderous rampage in Norway by Christian terrorist Anders Breivik, who cited their writings in a manifesto justifying his killing of 76 people on July 22, 2011, as the beginning of a war against "multiculturalists" who preach tolerance of Muslims.

CAP's report, "Fear, Inc.," noted a number of Emerson's falsehoods and exaggerations about American Muslims and examined the convoluted financing of Emerson's Investigative Project on Terrorism, which has drawn substantial support from right-wing foundations and funders whose political interests have benefited from a surging right-wing campaign against Muslims.

"Emerson's nonprofit organization IPT received a total of \$400,000 from Donors Capital Fund in 2007 and 2008, as well as \$100,000 from the Becker Foundation, and \$250,000 from Daniel Pipes' Middle East Forum, according to our research," the report said.

"Emerson's nonprofit organization, in turn, helps fund his for-profit company, SAE Productions. IPT paid SAE Productions \$3.33 million to enable the company to 'study alleged ties between American Muslims and overseas terrorism.' Emerson is SAE's sole employee. ... This kind of action enrages Ken Berger, president of Charity Navigator, a nonprofit watchdog group. He argued that 'basically, you have a nonprofit acting as a front organization, and all that money going to a for-profit.'"

Emerson's combination of ideological journalism and loose handling of the facts also should raise questions about his previous work as he sought to discredit serious investigations into the Republican-Israeli role in the Iran-Contra scandal, dating back to its apparent origins in the alleged sabotage of President Carter's 1980 hostage negotiations. [For more on that, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Unmasking an October Surprise 'Debunker'.](#)"]

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for *The Associated Press* and *Newsweek* in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). You also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

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