

Why does the US government think burning Qurans is less civilised than drone attacks on civilians

By [Lamis Andoni](#)

Theme: [Religion](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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The plan to burn Qurans has served to confirm perceptions that US wars are driven by hostility towards Muslims [EPA]

Barack Obama, the US president, has warned that threats to burn the Quran are a sure and effective way to swell the ranks of al-Qaeda. This may be true, but largely because such symbolic acts of 'Islamophobia' are widely viewed as verifying the perception that the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, along with its backing of Israel, are motivated by its hostility towards Muslims.

The previously unheard of pastor of a small Florida church may have scrapped his plan to publicly burn hundreds of Qurans on the ninth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, but the threat alone has done untold damage to the already troubled relationship between the Muslim world and the West.

The US government's reaction to the plan will not have gone unnoticed. But no matter how strong the words of condemnation, those on the receiving end of US occupation or air raids will be struck by the apparent inconsistency.

General David Petraeus, the US commander in Afghanistan, warned that burning the Quran could endanger the lives of US troops who might become the target of retribution. But why do Obama and Petraeus think that burning the Quran is any less civilised or more dangerous than their use of unmanned drones to target suspected Taliban or al-Qaeda fighters and the subsequent civilian casualties these attacks often entail?

Terry Jones, the pastor behind the planned Quran bonfire, may be insane, as some, including his own daughter, have suggested. But what excuse do sane and sophisticated people like Obama, Petraeus, and Robert Gates, the US secretary of defence, have?

Dehumanisation

In his Cairo speech, Obama attributed the blame for some of the misunderstanding between the West and the Muslim world to the acts of terrorism carried out by a minority of Muslims. "The attacks of September 11, 2001 and the continued efforts of these extremists to engage in violence against civilians has led some in my country to view Islam as inevitably hostile

not only to America and Western countries, but also to human rights,” he said. But he totally glossed over the fact that before – just as after – 9/11, the US engaged in unjust wars against mainly Muslim countries – a threat that is more potent than any plan to burn Qurans.

If it were not for these wars and a history of US support for the Israeli occupation and dictators in the region, the threat to burn Qurans – as ugly and offensive as it clearly is – would not have been anything more than the act of a small-time minister searching for attention and obsessed with his own prejudices.

But in an atmosphere of ‘Islamophobia’ – fed by a mistrust and ignorance of Islam – and US wars against Muslim countries, the suggestion of a Quran-burning day becomes something much more significant.

It also reflects the general dehumanisation of Muslims and Arabs – particularly those who have been the victims of American and Israeli bombings – that has taken root, allowing some of the US public to become immune to the crimes committed by their own government or with their government’s backing.

Today, as Americans grieve the victims of the 9/11 attacks, it is important to recognise that sorrow is a shared universal sentiment that does not exclude religions or races.

In the weeks following 9/11, the American press devoted pages and air time to giving a human face to the victims of the attacks. It is not realistic or even right to expect the American media to give the exact same treatment to the victims of US wars. But, until very recently, the US media rarely even questioned the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and when it did, the questions asked rarely centred on the civilian deaths, which were at best seen as inevitable incidents of war and, at worst, as necessary collateral damage.

Such a mentality is more damaging in the long run than any individual threatening to burn the Quran, because it plants the seeds of dehumanisation.

In the words of Kathy Kelly, an American peace activist who is currently facing trial for ‘trespassing’ in a drone-manufacturing plant during an anti-war protest, the mainstream media “does little to help ordinary [Americans] ... understand that the drones which hover over potential targets in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen create small “ground zeroes” in multiple locales on an everyday basis”.

Lamis Andoni is an analyst and commentator on Middle Eastern and Palestinian affairs.

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