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The Washington Post

Anti-Muslim film director in hiding, following Libya, Egypt violence

By **Nia-Malika Henderson** and **Michelle Boorstein**, Updated: Wednesday, September 12, 1:30 PM

The director of a controversial anti-Islam film has gone into hiding, according to reports, fearing reprisals over a work that has sparked violence in Egypt and Libya and led to the deaths of four Americans.

Sam Bacile, a California real estate developer, posted a 13-minute clip of "The Innocence of Muslims," in July, and the film became a lightning rod after the Egyptian media began showing parts of it on air and dubbed versions of the English-language film appeared on the Internet.

It depicts the Prophet Muhammad as a bumbling idiot, born out of wedlock and making up verses to the Islamic holy book to suit his purposes and desires. The film also shows him as having intimate relations with women and suggests that he was gay.

Any flesh-and-blood depiction of Muhammad is offensive to Muslims.

"This is a political movie," Bacile, 56, told the Associated Press, adding that he didn't expect the film to spark such fury. "The U.S. lost a lot of money and a lot of people in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but we're fighting with ideas."

Bacile identified himself to several news organizations as an Israeli-born Jew who works as a real estate developer in California. Yet his identity remains something of a mystery--Bacile is not listed in any directories or incorporations or real estate deeds and is not licensed in California as a real estate broker. And Israeli authorities told the Associated Press that they don't have any records of Bacile.

There are also questions about whether the film sparked the violence in Libya, which according to some reports seemed to be more coordinated than the protests in Egypt where some 2,000 gathered outside the U.S. Embassy in Cairo.

The eruption of violence came around the 11th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terror attacks, as Americans paused to remember the 3,000 people who lost their lives.

Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three others were killed after protesters attacked the U.S. consulate in Benghazi.

Nihad Awad, national executive director of the Washington-based Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), condemned both the killings and the film. Awad said in a statement:

“We urge that this ignorant attempt to provoke the religious feelings of Muslims in the Arabic-speaking world be ignored and that its extremist producers not be given the cheap publicity they so desperately seek.

“Those who created this trashy film do not represent the people of America or the Christian faith. The only proper response to intentional provocations such as this film is to redouble efforts to promote mutual understanding between faiths and to marginalize extremists of all stripes.”

A controversial Florida pastor was among those promoting “The Innocence of Muslims,” which cost \$5 million to make and stars amateur actors, some of whom appear to be wearing make-up to darken their faces.

Bacile said that the film was backed by 100 Jewish donors, according to Bacile.

Among the promoters is Morris Sadek, who heads the National American Coptic Assembly and the Rev. Terry Jones, leader of a small group that holds virulently anti-Islam events.

Tuesday evening, Jones sent out a press release blaming the Muslim faith for the protests and saying the group would be running a trailer later in the evening for the film.

The trailer was part of a one-to-two hour “live event” that Jones was doing from his Gainesville center for Sept. 11, said Fran Ingram, a spokeswoman for his group, Stand Up America. The whole broadcast included the handlebar-moustached pastor in a black “infidel” t-shirt standing in front of a fabric lynched devil dressed in a white turban for what they group dubbed “International Judge Muhammed Day.”

It wasn’t clear if Jones, who garnered worldwide attention in recent years with his threats to burn the Koran, had promoted “The Innocence of Muslims” before the rioting began.

Asked if Jones was connected in any way with the making of the film, Ingram said she couldn’t comment.

Alice Crites contributed to this story.

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