

New York Mayor Bloomberg backs police commissioner in uproar over anti-Muslim film

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New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg defended his longstanding police commissioner last week after revelations about his role in a vicious anti-Muslim film widely shown to city police officers as part of “counterterrorism” training in 2010.

Muslim civil rights activists and their supporters gathered on the steps of City Hall on January 26 to demand that Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly and police spokesman Paul Browne resign. Kelly provided a lengthy interview for the film, *The Third Jihad*, which was screened for nearly 1,500 officers.

After a yearlong cover-up, Kelly was forced to admit that he cooperated with the makers of the film. While including a hollow claim that it does not accuse all Muslims, the movie argues that most Muslim-Americans are involved in a stealth campaign to promote terrorism.

Using sensational and disturbing imagery out of context, the movie paints Muslim-American leaders as secret extremists and conspirators, stating that their “primary tactic” is deception. The film includes footage of Islamist terrorists shooting Christians in the head and the sheet-covered bodies of executed children. Another scene features a doctored photograph of an Islamic flag flying over the White House.

“This is the true agenda of much of Islam in America,” the film’s narrator ominously declares. “A strategy to infiltrate and dominate America... This is the war you don’t see.”

The 72-minute film was produced by the Clarion Fund, a New York-based nonprofit group whose advisory board includes notorious neoconservatives like Daniel Pipes. Ten years ago, Pipes founded Campus Watch, an outfit that has worked to harass and

blacklist scholars and campus speakers who are critical of Zionism and the Israeli regime.

At last week’s demonstration, protesters accused Kelly of lying to the media, the Muslim community, and the city as a whole. They called for “retraining” of the officers who had seen the film.

“The Muslim American community and their allies are tired of the lie after lie that the NYPD keeps feeding this community, and we’re here to say we are demanding accountability,” said Linda Sarsour of the Muslim American Civil Liberties Coalition.

During the 2008 presidential campaign, the Clarion Fund distributed an anti-Muslim film entitled, “Obsession: Radical Islam’s War against the West.” The group distributed 28 million free copies of the DVD by including it as inserts in newspapers across the country, including the *New York Times*, which then delivered them directly to their subscribers.

The *Village Voice* first reported a year ago that the NYPD had been using *The Third Jihad* to train its officers. At the time, NYPD spokesman Paul Browne claimed the video had been shown to only a handful of officers and that the segment on Kelly came from an older interview. Eventually, a Freedom of Information Act request by the Brennan Center for Justice at the New York University Law School revealed the film had been shown to officers “on a continuous loop” for up to a year of training.

“The department’s response was to deny it and to fight our request for information,” Faiza Patel, a director at the Brennan Center, told the *Times*.

Last Monday, Browne claimed once again that the clip of Kelly had been lifted from an older video. However, the NYPD’s clumsy attempt at a cover-up

fell apart the following day when Raphael Shore, the film's producer, emailed the *Times* and provided the exact date of the 90-minute interview with Kelly at Police Headquarters on March 19, 2007.

Browne immediately revised his account when informed of the email. "He's right," said Browne, in reference to Shore. "In fact, I recommended in February 2007 that Commissioner Kelly be interviewed." He added that when he viewed the film for the first time last year he had assumed the interview with Kelly had been taken from an older clip, even though the video refers to the commissioner as an "interviewee."

When Browne claimed that the director of the film had asked to speak to Kelly for a film on "foiled terrorist plots and the current threat matrix," Shore sent a follow-up email in which he cast doubt on Browne's story. "Mr. Browne was informed that the interview was for a documentary on radical Islam," he said.

The screening of this propaganda film is part of a decade-long campaign by the ruling elite to demonize Muslims so as to divide the working class and undermine opposition to the neo-colonial wars being waged in countries with large Muslim populations. This reactionary campaign, with close ties to the Zionist lobby, has bipartisan support. *Obsession*, the earlier Clarion film, was shown on Capitol Hill in a screening cosponsored by Republican Congressman Eric Cantor and Florida Democrat Debbie Wasserman Schultz. The right-wing campaign, part of the buildup for the "war on terror," clearly has strong support within the Bloomberg administration, which was taken by surprise by the angry reaction to the latest revelations.

While Kelly apologized for his role in the video, Bloomberg has rushed to his police commissioner's defense, saying that he was sure that the clip of Kelly in the film had been "taken out of context."

"Commissioner Kelly should not step down. I think it's fair to say that it was a little bit of an embarrassment that this film was made," said Bloomberg. "Paul Browne is as honest and as competent as anybody in the business of representing the city and giving out information. I'm sure he acted in good faith."

Last August, an investigative report by the Associated Press revealed that over the past decade the NYPD had carried out an unprecedented spying operation against

Muslim immigrants and Muslim-Americans in close collaboration with the CIA. In 2003, Bloomberg and Kelly were given permission by a federal judge to expand their authority to conduct surveillance. Over the years, the NYPD has sent hundreds of undercover police officers into Muslim communities to monitor daily life in bars, cafes and nightclubs frequented by Muslims, and has spied on Muslims at their houses of worship.

Recent years have also seen a series of crude sting operations designed to entrap vulnerable Muslims and convict them on bogus "terror" charges. One of the most egregious examples was a case involving four impoverished African-American men from Newburgh, New York who converted to Islam while in prison and ended up ensnared in a manufactured "plot" to blow up a synagogue in the Bronx. A paid FBI informant used a variety of psychological tactics to manipulate the men, offering them money and food to gain their trust.

Mayor Bloomberg and the rest of the city's political establishment have grown increasingly worried about the possibility of massive social unrest in New York City, the scene last fall of mass protests against social inequality and the corporate stranglehold over political life. In carrying out its decade-long campaign of vilifying and spying on Muslim-Americans and Muslim immigrants, the ruling elite has laid the groundwork for a stepped-up assault on the democratic rights of the working class as a whole.



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