

“THEY HATE US FOR OUR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM”

As anti-American (and anti-Western) protest continue to spread across the Muslim world, the White House continues to claim the protests are all a response to the film, The Innocence of Muslims. Yesterday, Jay Carney said,

I think it's important to note with regards to that protest

that there are protests taking place in different countries across the world that are responding to the movie that has circulated on the Internet. As Secretary Clinton said today, the United States government had nothing to do with this movie. We reject its message and its contents. We find it disgusting and reprehensible. America has a history of religious tolerance and respect for religious beliefs that goes back to our nation's founding. We are stronger because we are the home to people of all religions, including millions of Muslims, and we reject the denigration of religion.

We also believe that there is no justification at all for responding to this movie with violence.

[snip]

I would note that, again, the protests we're seeing around the region are in reaction to this movie. They are not directly in reaction to any policy of the United States or the government of the United States or the people of the United States.

And he said something substantially similar in a gaggle a short time ago.

There are two problems with that.

First, the evidence in Libya that the attack, at least, was planned in advance with insider help. The Telegraph provides more details on the compromised safe houses and some of the sensitive documents taken from the Consulate.

Then there are more specific contexts, such as President Hadi's continued efforts to consolidate power in Yemen, as Iona Craig lays out. Plus, there is more opposition to US policy in Yemen than in some other countries in the region.

I've even seen credible questions about the role of increasing food costs—the same kind of pressure that contributed to the Arab Spring last year.

But ultimately, too, there's the question of why in several countries local guards have apparently allowed protestors to access the targeted compounds. While that could be a response to the movie, there also seems to be a factionalism involved.

All that's not to say this always reflects a widespread opposition to US policies in all the countries involved, especially Libya.

But it's to say that the White House wants this to be about a response to a movie, rather than a more nuanced response to some of the challenges that remain in our relations to the Middle East, including some justifiable opposition to our policies, either present or past.

I can understand doing that to get through the immediate moment of protests. But if the White House continues to ignore these underlying issues after the riots die down, it will be a big problem.