

FLYING WHILE MUSLIM

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CAIR/WEEL DONE

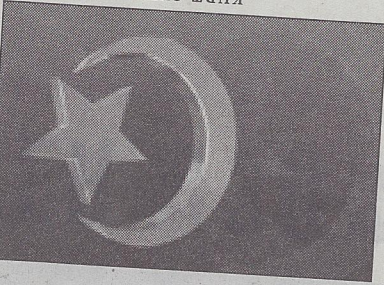
THE ironic story of two imams forced off a plane taking them to a conference on Islamophobia might be humorous if it did not expose unfounded and ethnically motivated passenger profiling. This cannot be tolerated in a democratic society.

The case of two Muslim scholars in Memphis confirms the reality of Islamophobia. This week, we have seen what this fear — if allowed to trump reason — means for America's Muslim community.

This was not an isolated occurrence. The event involving Atlantic Southeast Airlines came amid a flurry of similar incidents since the death of Osama bin Laden, according to the Council on American-Islamic Relations.

In the case of Imam Masudur Rahman, a professor of Arabic at the University of Memphis, the pilot said other passengers aboard the flight might feel uncomfortable. According to Rahman, the representative on the plane found no passengers to be uncomfortable.

To quibble on this fact, though, would be a mistake. Even if passengers professed anxiety riding in a plane next to men clad in typically Muslim clothing, the pilot's decision would be equally misguided. Following such reasoning, airlines might as well create special, barred-off sections on



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planes for those with names of Middle Eastern descent or with any relation to a Muslim community. Or, to prevent even the slightest case of anxiety, they could designate separate flights for believers of the Islamic faith. Do these ideas bring to mind any other periods of American history? For many Americans, jubilation after the death of bin Laden did not come without a fear of retaliatory attacks. However, while President Obama called on Americans to remain vigilant, he also made clear we are not at war with Islam.

Demonizing people based on name, religious beliefs or ethnic origins is not the answer to national-security worries. Security officials should work diligently to reduce repeated incidents of possible discrimination.