



ISTOCKPHOTO; PHOTO ILLUSTRATION/H. HOPP-BRUCE

JULIETTE KAYYEM

The Manchurian Mom?

Anti-Muslim paranoia aims to raise suspicions against Americans

There are Tiger Moms and Helicopter Moms and French Moms, and all sorts of labels to measure our adequacies as parents. But these moms have nothing on those who sacrifice in pursuit of a much-higher ideology. Now, thanks to Representative Michele Bachmann's attempts to root out the Muslim Brotherhood's "deep penetration" into the US government, the nation has been introduced to a new phenomenon: the Manchurian Mom.

According to the new wave of anti-Muslim accusations, America's enemy takes the form of a woman in national security who marries a man outside her faith as a decoy to her real intentions, acquires political positions and access to policy makers through her assimilation, and subverts the nation's interests while still propagating.

Who said women can't have it all?

It is simply not enough to mock the Bachmann crusade against the "civilizational jihad" festering in federal government. Much more than the recent and desperate accusations that President Obama needs to be "more American," the charges against those in government — appointees, civil servants, and advisers — are far more dangerous. They are intended not so much to root out the enemy in our midst, but to raise suspicions against Americans simply by demanding the hunt.

In five separate letters to the Departments of State, Justice, Homeland Security, and Defense, as well as the director of National Intelligence, Bachmann's congressional allies detail their objections about Islam's influence on America's policy. These policies include the relatively benign outreach efforts with Muslim organizations and apologies for the Koran burnings in Afghanistan. But it really isn't policies that the Bachmann cabal is worried about. It's the people.

Laced throughout the letters are vague statements about the personnel who work in counter-terrorism and national security, people who have devoted their lives to protecting the nation but whose background (Arabs and Muslims) or tangential relations (a friend of a friend, a long-lost cousin) make them suspect.

Laced throughout Michele Bachmann's letters are vague statements about personnel who work in counter-terrorism and national security.

If this all could be ignored, then the joke is on Bachmann. But it can't. Bachmann's co-signers include three members on the Select Committee on Intelligence

and two on the Judiciary Committee.

In government, such a request for the kind of information the letters demand — Joe McCarthy would be proud — will require each agency to track the strange claims and interview personnel. It will distract from a focus on the nation's security. But that's the point. It is the search that matters.

And in one instance, there is no need to search very hard. The letter to the State Department specifically names Huma Abedin, deputy chief of staff for Secretary Hillary Clinton. Her ties to Clinton appear, according to the race-baiting Center for Security Policy that Bachmann cites, to have influenced the State Department to take "actions recently that have been enormously favorable to the Muslim Brotherhood and its interests." These actions, one can suspect, consist of allowing the newly democratic Egyptians to elect the Muslim Brotherhood into power.

But what is most nefarious about the attacks is the notion that Abedin has been groomed by some Muslim master to move with the top tiers of the political establishment. Her marriage and pregnancy with Anthony Weiner, the former congressman and a Jewish-American, is merely a front that gives her access to promote the Islamic cause. The utterly perverse statement treats the talented Abedin as an escort in the name of jihad. The fact that the attacks focus on her access to power being made easier through her marriage to Weiner also caters to anti-Semitic stereotypes (shared by both Christian and Islamic radicals) that Jews run America.

These new tactics go beyond Islam as a religion. They are intended to make Muslims or Arabs in government who are often far less senior than Abedin, or those in policy positions who seek a better relationship with the Islamic world, feel like outsiders. It will most surely affect the desire of those who can contribute language and cultural skills to ever work in government.

I am of Arab Christian descent. I worked for over a decade in national security as a political appointee in state and federal government, married a Jewish lawyer, and have three children. I am either exceptionally lucky or a Manchurian Mom. True, given our times, the professional and personal can often merge; with so many family members born in Lebanon, my security clearance reviews were onerous. But it seemed a small nuisance for the benefit of serving the nation.

Like so many in government now, my narrative seems typically American. And, I suspect, that is exactly the problem.

Juliette Kayyem can be reached at jkayyem@globe.com. Follow her on Twitter [@juliettekayyem](https://twitter.com/juliettekayyem)