

Al-Beavis and Al-Butthead, Or, A Plane Is Not a Comedy Club

by Hugh Fitzgerald

Adam Saleh, a Muslim who calls himself a comedian and “YouTube prankster,” was recently removed from a Delta flight in London. He claimed that a phone call he made to his mother in Arabic had alarmed passengers, who were entirely too jittery on hearing that language. But according to two passengers who sat nearby and heard everything Saleh and his travelling companion “Slim” Albaher said – they were speaking in English to each other – that supposed phone call never happened. It was not the use of Arabic that triggered discomfort. Another passenger on the plane was overheard speaking Arabic, but in a normal voice, and no one said a word to her. It was, rather, the repeated shouting across the cabin, and in Arabic, by “Slim” Albaher, that alarmed some.

One of those nearby passengers, “Anthony,” reported that “I literally watched him [Saleh] egging his friend on **to shout out** across the aeroplane, **even after they were asked politely to stop they carried on and told people to shut their mouths.**” Saleh told his friend “**to shout something in Arabic which he did a total of 4 times.**” And after “Slim shouted, a couple of other passengers told the Muslim men that they were making them and their children uncomfortable and [one mother] asked ‘could they shut up.’” And then they [Saleh and Albaher] “told her to shut up and then he [Albaher] shouted it again.” Anthony also said that “Saleh was filming passengers’ reactions to their outburst but were made to delete it by a Delta flight attendant.”

This incident was merely the latest in which Adam Saleh, who

finds himself endlessly amusing, tried to elicit fear or anger, examples of the supposed overreactions of Islamophobic Americans to encounters – especially on airplanes – with him and his friends, who are always presented as the most innocuous of Arabs/Middle Easterners/Muslims. When Saleh egged Albaher on to yell out across the cabin in Arabic (as he, Adam Saleh, captured on film the reaction of passengers), it was clear that Saleh was determined to create a disturbance. He wanted to cause alarm among passengers, to film that alarm, and to post it at YouTube, all the while maintaining a disingenuous attitude of bewildered innocence. Could it really be that Americans are now so readily panicked that even a call home to his mother could set them off? Is the use of Arabic enough to cause a frenzy of fear?

But there was no innocent call, no call at all, to his mother. Nor was there a frenzy, either, from passengers and crew, but merely the intelligent alarm that anyone might display when, on a plane, someone starts shouting and won't stop despite being implored to do so, and if that shouting is in Arabic, any alarm is even more understandable, given the history of Muslim terrorists and planes. It was not Arabic, but the repeated *yelling* in Arabic at the top of Albaher's lungs, and his refusal to stop, when asked to do so, while his companion egged him on, that was cause for concern.

This was no accidental encounter, but a staged provocation, and Adam Saleh has a whole series of these, uploaded to YouTube, where you may see him, proud of his sophomoric "humor," following essentially the same script, eliciting the desired reaction and then treating that reaction as absurd when, in fact, experience teaches us it makes sense. If you were on a plane, and suddenly someone started screaming in Arabic, and would not shut up, even when asked repeatedly and politely to do so, would any thoughts of conceivable danger pass through your mind? Would you think the shouter might be having an uncontrollable outburst of rage? Would you worry

about what might come next? Might you think that such a person, and those with whom he was in cahoots, should be removed from the flight, because deliberately scaring passengers is enough to warrant such removal? Of course you would. It is Muslims themselves whose behavior has forged the link between Islam and terrorism in the public imagination.

Or does this Merry Prankster of the Skies have a point? Is it true that a passenger or crew member who suddenly hears someone screaming in Arabic on a plane and becomes alarmed is overreacting? Let's consider the relevant history. Given that scarcely a day goes by without news, somewhere in the world, of an attack by allahu-akbaring Muslim terrorists, and that nearly 30,000 such attacks have taken place since September 11, 2001, isn't great unease at someone screaming in Arabic, and *on a plane about to take off*, perfectly justified? Given, too, that the takeover of planes by Muslim Arab terrorists is what allowed the 9/11 attacks (two planes smashing into the Twin Towers, a third into the Pentagon, a fourth brought down over rural Pennsylvania before it could do the damage intended), aren't we right to worry about Muslims suddenly behaving strangely on planes, even on one that has not yet taken off? For all we know, the shouter may be ready to detonate himself, or to take the airplane hostage on the ground by threatening to do so. Is it ludicrous, or humanly understandable, to be anxious about Muslims or Arabic speakers who, on a plane, a place where anxieties are already high, are yelling uncontrollably, and refusing to quiet down, when planes have so often been involved in acts of Islamic terrorism?

And it's not just those terrorist acts that succeed that we remember. Even those foiled in time make a deep impression. Think of those other, well-publicized attempts by Muslims that did not succeed in bringing down planes in flight. Richard Reid, a British convert to Islam, was trying to detonate explosives in his shoes, but couldn't quite manage; thanks to

his example, however, every airport in the world now requires that passengers take off their shoes in going through security. And though those three Muslim terrorists who were planning to use liquid explosives disguised as soft drinks, in order to blow up seven transatlantic flights, were caught in time, whenever you are asked to remove all containers of liquids of more than 3 ounces from your carry-on, you naturally think of them. Each time you go through airport security, and take your shoes off, or remove that 4 oz. bottle of shampoo you had overlooked, you are reminded of Muslims, planes, and terrorism. Whom would Adam Saleh have us blame for making that connection? He may find our reactions a source of thigh-slapping amusement, but few will share his indecent sense of humor; worries about terrorism are not comical. And don't forget still other attempts by Muslims to blow up planes. Think of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the Nigerian Muslim who concealed plastic explosives in his underwear but failed to detonate them properly, on a flight from Amsterdam to Detroit. We still don't know how – was it a member of the cleaning crew, or a passenger? – a bomb was smuggled onto the Russian Metrojet plane over the Sinai, killing all 224 aboard. And there have been other attempts by Muslim terrorists involving planes that, because they were foiled much earlier in the planning stage, have not received much notice.

The point of the latest “prank” (a word which is far too forgiving, as if it's all been in good fun) by Adam Saleh was to deliberately upset people, and then have them react in ways that the “prankster” could point to as reflecting a climate of quite unnecessary fear. But after those 30,000 terrorist attacks by Muslims, after those planes flown by Muslims into the Twin Towers, the Pentagon, a Pennsylvania field, after the Shoe Bomber and the Liquid Explosives Bombers and the Underwear Bomber, after the plane that blew up over the Sinai, it would be crazy *not* to be made anxious by someone repeatedly yelling out something in Arabic, the language that by now we quite rightly associate with Muslim terrorism.

A plane is not a comedy club, a place for the adam-salehs of this world to stage and record their unfunny little skits that always involve scaring people. Taking him off the flight was right and proper, but only the first step. He and his friends now have the gall to call for a boycott of Delta. This gets everything backwards. It is Delta, or rather, it is Delta and all the other airlines, that ought to be banning these propaganda jihadists from flying. For flying is not a right but a privilege. For the sake of their passengers' peace of mind, and for the safety of the flight, airlines should collectively agree that anyone *deliberately* sowing, and then recording, fear among airline passengers, in order to make a point about "Islamophobia," will be permanently banned from flying on any flight to or from or within the United States. This is not just a matter of preventing passenger discomfort. It is also a question of safety. If cabin crew members have to focus their attention on those who are deliberately creating such anxiety among the passengers, they may be less able to quickly respond to the other dangers that arise in flight. The same is true of the pilots, who no doubt are made aware whenever there is trouble in the cabin, and if it is deliberately caused by smirking al-salehs, this can only hinder the pilots' ability to give their full attention, as they needs must, to their flying.

Or it might be more effective, instead of putting the burden on the airlines to impose such a policy (and likely receive Muslim threats for their pains), for Congress to act. It could pass legislation requiring that all airlines prohibit from flying anyone who has "deliberately and repeatedly created anxiety on airline flights for the purposes of propaganda or self-aggrandizement." Such a measure would undoubtedly pass overwhelmingly. Who, after all, could be against such a commonsensical ban, other than the fellow travelers of CAIR? And that would put an end to all the fun Adam Saleh has been having, at our Infidel expense, on planes, in flight or on the ground, and force him to take his beavis-and-butthead hilarity

elsewhere, possibly to those audiences famous for their sense of humor, in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran.

First published in