

Is Cat Stevens a Terrorist?
By: Stephen Schwartz / Weekly Standard
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Why Yusuf Islam was turned away from the United States.

On Tuesday, U.S. authorities diverted a United Airlines London-Washington flight to Bangor, Maine, where the ex-pop singer formerly known as Cat Stevens, now as Yusuf Islam, was questioned by federal security agents, and then ordered deported back to Britain. Yusuf Islam, it turns out, is on the official "no-fly list."

This action will doubtless provoke loud and prolonged guffaws from those who consider American security policies to be excessive. But a look at the career and associations of Yusuf Islam since he became a Muslim in 1977 shows that the decision was correct.

Yusuf Islam is already well known for his public endorsement of the death sentence issued by Ayatollah Khomeini against Salman Rushdie in February 1989. "Salman Rushdie, indeed any writer who abuses the prophet or indeed any prophet under Islamic law, the sentence for that is actually death," he said at the time. In addition, he has been barred from entering Israel because of alleged financial aid given to terrorist groups.

Is the singer a terrorist himself? Probably not. Is he an active sympathizer of terrorist groups? Perhaps not as much as he was in the past.

But Yusuf Islam is most certainly a fundamentalist Muslim, whose views are radical enough to set him at odds with the great majority of the world's Islamic adherents, and they are no better expressed than in his comments on his own field of expression: music.

Wahhabism, the state religion in Saudi Arabia, and the inspirer of al Qaeda, is especially known for its hatred of music. In Wahhabi theology, all music except for drum accompaniment to religious chanting is *haram*, or forbidden. For anybody who has had contact with Muslim civilization, this is a fairly shocking bit of information, since music is one of the great glories of Islamic culture.

Yusuf Islam has demonstrated his sympathy for this posture on several occasions. Above all, he is careful to point out his caution about bucking the Wahhabis in this realm. In 1997, he released an album titled *I Have No Cannons That Roar*, dedicated, he said, to the cause of the Bosnian Muslims. In an interview with Stephen Kinzer, appearing in the *New York Times* on December 8, 1997, he commented on the project, "I've . . . used a very conservative approach. You only hear my own voice, a slight choral accompaniment and drums. Let's say that's the safest option according to certain Islamic schools of thought. I've made minimal use of musical instruments, and in some schools of thought in Islam musical instruments are disapproved of."

This attitude was particularly dissonant given that Bosnian Muslim music is anything but conservative, and Bosnian songs about the recent war used violins, accordions, and numerous other instruments considered *haram* by radical Islamists. One popular Bosnian soldiers' ballad included a verse declaring devotion to their "old songs," which would be anathema to Wahhabis. But for Yusuf Islam, honoring the Bosnians, who had shed their blood defending their religious identity, was less important than honoring fundamentalism.

The album itself has been advertised in a misleading way by the Islamic Society of North America ([ISNA](#)), part of the "Wahhabi lobby" that imposes Saudi theology on the majority of American Sunni Muslims. The ISNA website falsely describes Yusuf Islam as "the primary composer and lyricist" of the album. Actually, he wrote only two of the songs. Most of the rest were composed by a Bosnian poet, Dzermaludin Latic, who is notably moderate in his views and--full disclosure here--a close friend of mine. When I saw him in Sarajevo a month ago, Dzemo Latic was writing a memorial article for Czeslaw Milosz, something Yusuf Islam would probably never think of doing. And the Bosnian songs on that album employ *haram* instruments.

Yusuf Islam's own [website](#) further reveals his fundamentalist and radical bent. It celebrates his collaboration with a notorious American Islamist, Shaikh Hamza Yusuf [Hanson]. Hamza Yusuf was known before September 11 for his radical preaching. In 1991, Hamza Yusuf "gave a provoking speech about why 'Jihad is the Only Way,'" at an International Islamic Conference held at the University of Southern California by the local unit of the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), a front for the al Qaeda-allied Jama'at-i-Islami movement in Pakistan. The same Los Angeles event was addressed by Imam Siraj Wahhaj, an unindicted co-conspirator named in 1995 in a plot to blow up New York City monuments.

At the 21st ICNA Annual Convention, held at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, in 1996, Imam Hamza Yusuf declared, "I am a citizen of this country not by choice but by birth. I reside in this country not by choice but by conviction in

attempting to spread the message of Islam in this country. I became Muslim in part because I did not believe in the false gods of this society whether we call them Jesus or democracy or the Bill of Rights or any other element of this society that is held sacrosanct by the ill-informed peoples that make up this charade of a society. . . . [T]here should be no voting or debate . . . [W]e have no room for ayes or nays."

After September 11, Hamza Yusuf adopted moderate camouflage and boasted of meeting with and "advising" President George W. Bush. However, at this year's convention of the Islamic Society of North America, on September 3, 2004, Hamza Yusuf declaimed, "the Republican party is basing an entire political platform, in the most powerful military nation on the earth . . . on the idea that Islamic fanatics are a threat to the security of this country, and this must be condemned. . . . I have never believed in my lifetime that a presidential election had any significance. . . . We must reject what is happening in the current administration in our name. . . . Those neoconservatives . . . that claim that this country was designed by people that wanted Christianity to be the law of the land . . . are telling a grave lie to the people of the United States." Hamza Yusuf followed up these rantings with fantasies of Islamic conquest of the United States and an endorsement of none other than Patrick J. Buchanan as a defender of "indestructible" Islam.

Those who scoff at the idea that the singer formerly known as Cat Stevens could end up on the U.S. government's "no-fly list" only show how unfamiliar they are with his beliefs and most prominent associations and activities over the last two decades.

Stephen Schwartz, an author and journalist, is author of *The Two Faces of Islam: The House of Sa'ud from Tradition to Terror*. A vociferous critic of Wahhabism, Schwartz is a frequent contributor to *National Review*, *The Weekly Standard*, and other publications.