

DAILY NEWS, MONDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2001

N.Y.ers find war surreal, but think it's best choice

City's Muslims, Arabs anxious

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As they huddled around TV sets watching news of the military strike against Afghanistan, members of New York's Arab and Muslim communities reacted yesterday with support for the U.S. government and concern for Afghan civilians.

At the Afghan Kabab restaurant in Flushing, Queens, Fariba Sultani, cheered the attack on her home country and the Taliban ruling party.

"I hope they wipe out the Taliban," said Sultani, 28, who has been in the U.S. for 10 years.

Those people who died are just like our people. I hope they catch Osama Bin Laden, they bring him to the World Trade Center, hang him from a pole and skin him alive.

"Basically, he is ruining our country."

Even her 5-year-old son, Harris, had an opinion: "I don't ever want to go back."

Others said they were concerned that the military strike would spawn more terrorist attacks on American soil.

"If Osama Bin Laden dies, there will be a thousand Osama Bin Ladens," said Hamed Nabawy, a grocer on Atlantic Ave. in Brooklyn. "There is a big hatred against America, not against Americans but against the foreign policy."

Fears for civilians

Mohammed Batal, 18, a waiter who moved to the U.S. from Syria three years ago, said he fears innocent civilians will be killed.

"I'm worried about the people there, not the army or the government," Batal said. "They shouldn't bomb the people. If they bomb the people, it's going to be the same as Sept. 11 in New York."

Dr. Fakhra Haq, a public school teacher who was born in Pakistan and has lived on Staten Island for 25 years, said she is "very, very, sad."

"The poor people in Afghanistan and Pakistan have been through so much over the years — civil wars, poverty," she said. "At the same time, we need to bring those responsible to justice."

Haq said she wishes the Taliban would have reacted more responsibly to U.S. demands.

"The ordinary people are always the ones that are going to get beaten up. This is what war does to them, and that is what is

the saddest part," she said.

"Although many expressed concern about Afghan civilians, most said they fully supported President Bush and the American troops involved in the strike."

"They're doing the right thing. They came here to our home and they killed so many innocent people," said Malko Karkenny, a Brooklyn grocer. "We have to get rid of this bunch of terrorists and the people behind them. I hope there are no American casualties."

At the New Kouchi Super Market, an Afghan store in Queens, customers were buying prayer rugs and Kabul jam. A poster behind the deli counter read "Free Afghanistan."

No one answers phone

Saeed Azimi, 24, who works at the store, said he left his family behind in Kabul and hasn't spoken to them since the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

"I call, and no one picks up the phone in Afghanistan," Azimi said. "I don't know what happened to my family, but I support America. I'd like for Afghanistan to be free again."

Antjum Sabar, 20, a Pakistani student at Queens College, also supported the U.S. strikes.

"As long as they catch that guy, Osama Bin Laden, I'll be happy," said Sabar, who has just received an acceptance letter to the NYPD academy. "I support the bombing if they clean up the Taliban organization."

Bur Rashid Ahmad, 26, an electrical engineer, said he still has second thoughts. "They haven't released anything that says Osama Bin Laden did this," he said.

Imam Omar Abu Namus at the Islamic Cultural Center in Manhattan said: "This confrontation is to be deplored. I feel very sorry for what happened at the World Trade Center and Washington and now in Afghanistan. I would hope the bombing is kept to a limited scale, and I also wish casualties can be kept to the lowest possible number, that no civilians would fall as victims to this attack."



SERIOUS DISCUSSION

The U.S. bombing of Afghanistan had all of New York talking, including these men outside Mosque Masjid Hazrat Abubeker Sadiq in Flushing, Queens.

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