

The Wind and the Lion – Hollywood's Defense of Radical Islam in the Shadow of Vietnam

by Norman Berdichevsky (March 2015)



Anyone viewing *The Wind and the Lion* on Netflix might think that it was produced today by Hamas, Hizbollah, or CAIR – the Council of American Islamic Relations, so effusive is its romantic glorification of violent Islam complete with beheadings of helpless captives (other Muslims who have not sufficiently demonstrated their loyalty) whose main character, a Moroccan brigand and tribal leader, portrayed by actor Sean Connery exclaims....*"I am Mulay Ahmed Muhamed Raisuli the Magnificent, sherif of the Riffian Berbers. I am the true defender of the faithful and the blood of the prophet runs in me and I am but a servant of his will."* The film was made in 1975 simultaneously with the fall of Saigon and the end of the hated Vietnam war which set the scene for the subsequent four decades of American mea culpas, pitiless self-flagellation and the current rush to accept American guilt for Islamophobia.

The film's dialogue excoriates American President Theodore Roosevelt as a madman willing to risk world war with the European imperialist powers so as not to be left out of the act as they scramble for increased power and prestige in North Africa, yet nevertheless admire him because he is also a man of courage, honor, manliness and audacity like Raisuly. Much of the dialogue, especially that of President Roosevelt could be put in the mouth of a repentant President Lyndon B. Johnson if he were still in office and had reversed himself entirely on American participation in what many critics regarded as a Vietnamese Civil War. In a scene where Roosevelt is interviewed by journalists amidst the rugged terrain of Yellowstone National Park.

Dialogue 1:

Theodore Roosevelt: The American grizzly is a symbol of the American character: strength, intelligence, ferocity. Maybe a little blind and reckless at times... but courageous beyond all doubt. And one other trait that goes with all previous.

2nd Reporter: And that, Mr. President?

Theodore Roosevelt: Loneliness. The American grizzly lives out his life alone. Indomitable, unconquered – but always alone. He has no real allies, only enemies, but none of them as great as he.

2nd Reporter: And you feel this might be an American trait?

Theodore Roosevelt: Certainly. The world will never love us. They respect us – they might even grow to fear us. But they will never love us, for we have too much audacity! And, we're a bit blind and reckless at times too.

2nd Reporter: Are you perhaps referring to the situation in Morocco and the Panama Canal.

Theodore Roosevelt: If you say so... The American grizzly embodies the spirit of America. He should be our symbol! Not that ridiculous eagle – he's nothing more than a dandified vulture.

The plot of the film is a thoroughly altered story line of a real historical incident involving Teddy Roosevelt, and Raisuly in 1904, the year Roosevelt considered running for the office of President which he had inherited as successor to the assassinated McKinley in 1901. In the film, a beautiful American woman, Eden Perdicaris (played by Candice Bergen), and her two children are kidnapped by Berber brigand Mulai Ahmed er Raisuli (Connery), prompting Roosevelt (played by Brian Keith) to send an armed invasion and rescue mission to Morocco. The real Perdicaris incident involved the kidnapping of a middle-aged businessman Ion Perdicaris (the husband of Eden who actually was named Ellen) and his stepson, both of whom were not harmed. The actual Ion Perdicaris was the son Greek immigrant Gregory Perdicaris who had done well in the U.S. but returned to Greece when he faced imminent Confederate confiscation of his property in South Carolina in 1862. Ion later met Ellen Varley, wife of a telegraph engineer C.F. Varley in Malvern, England. Varley was away on a foreign assignment and Ellen abandoned him for Perdicaris. The Varleys were divorced in 1873 and Ellen settled in Tangier with Perdicaris and her two sons and two daughters. Pedicaris served as American consul in Tangier and the family was the center of much social life for the European diplomats.

Of course, this would have left the film without any romantic element, so in the film, wife "Eden" becomes the captive held for ransom and in fact is the only female character in the entire film. Other females are all simply faceless hidden behind their veils and saying nothing; the wives and concubines of the Arab and Berber chieftains. Similarly, the writer and

director of the film John Milius, unaware of future political incorrectness is absolutely honest in not hiding the racist views of the Arab and Berber rulers in Morocco towards their black slaves. Blacks are portrayed throughout the film as cannon fodder, menial slaves and without human value. They are stepping stools to allow the ruling lighter skinned Arabs to mount their camels and horses or simply stand as human furniture, holding up trays of fruit as if they were tables. In Ellen's own real diary, she honestly reveals the nature of Muslim Morocco in 1904....*"Morocco, at that time, had no roads, not even a carriage or wheel of any kind, so we went everywhere, even at night to dinners and dances, on horses and donkeys, and if it rained, I was carried in a sedan chair on the shoulders of four Jews. No Moor would carry 'a dog of a Christian,' so the Jews kindly helped us out."*

On May 18, 1904, Ion Perdicaris, and Ellen's son Cromwell (from her previous marriage) were kidnapped from their home by Mulai Ahmed er Raisuli's bandits. Several of Perdicaris's servants were injured by Raisuli's men, and Ellen was left behind alone (apparently not attractive in real life as a middle age woman, wife and mother of four children). Raisuli demanded that the Sultan Abdelaziz of Morocco, pay him \$70,000 ransom, safe conduct, and control of two of Morocco's wealthiest districts. In the film, Raisuli is cast as a true patriot whose dislike of the sultan is due to his rejection of the policy of allowing French, Spanish, German and British influence to dominate the country and profane the true faith and national dignity. There is an element of truth in this in that it is backed up by the Ion's statements after his release when he stated: *"I go so far as to say that I do not regret having been his prisoner for some time... He is not a bandit, not a murderer, but a patriot forced into acts of brigandage to save his native soil and his people from the yoke of tyranny."*

Roosevelt was angered by the kidnapping, being under the mistaken belief that Ion Perdicaris was still an American citizen. At the urging of Secretary of State Hay and the Consul-General of Tangier, the president ordered warships and several Marine companies to the Moroccan coast under orders not to land or act without the permission of Washington. The plan provided to use them to seize the custom-houses of Morocco, which supplied much of its revenue, if the Moroccan government did not fulfill American demands. For Roosevelt, it was a convenient distraction and chance to emphasize his hero image from the days of the Spanish American War as the Rough Rider commander of the charge up San Juan Hill.

The threat was to ensure that the Sultan persuade Raisuli to release Perdicaris, and to attack Raisuli if Perdicaris were killed. The only Marines to actually land on shore were a small detachment of a dozen men, carrying only side-arms, who arrived to protect the Consulate and Mrs. Perdicaris. In the film, this becomes several companies of heavily armed marines and

sailors who quick march to the Sultan's palace and shoot their way inside, gunning down all the guards and later are able to be persuaded by the beautiful Mrs. Pedicaris who is enamored of Raisuli to join with the bandit and destroy the German military forces protecting the Sultan.

What makes the film simply grotesque is the warming relationship of the beautiful but prim Mrs. Perdicaris and her two children who gradually move from contempt, hatred and fear of Raisuli and the Muslim culture of Morocco to an "understanding," appreciation and even affection/love for him and his romantic nomadic way of life. His explanation for the kidnapping is eventually accepted as the honorable thing to do

Dialogue 2

Eden: And this is your way? Abducting women and children?

Raisuli: I prefer to fight the European armies, but they do not fight as men – they fight as dogs! Men prefer to fight with swords, so they can see each other's eyes! Sometimes, this is not possible. Then, they fight with rifles. The Europeans have guns that fire many times promiscuously and rend the Earth. There is no honor in this – nothing is decided from this. Therefore, I take women and children when it pleases me!

It is also the dialogue between Roosevelt and about him by more responsible colleagues that cast the American President in the same light as LBJ and Nixon were regarded by their critics....

Dialogue 3

American Consul in Tangier Samuel Gummere: You and I are both old men and we've seen these disasters come and go. And our job is to make this one go – and make it look good!
[winks]

Admiral Chadwick: I must remind you, sir, that I was at Santiago Bay when this President was running up San Juan Hill. And I'm afraid we'll have to do more than just "look good" this time!

Gummere: Well, what did you, uh, have in mind exactly?

Captain Jerome, United States Marine Corps [stands, smiling] Military intervention!

Dialogue 4

John Hay: Gentlemen, the Presidency was never won by a Vice-President filling out his fallen predecessor's term of office. Now, that may not obtain in this instance but...

Sen. Henry Cabot Lodge: The only thing people will remember about McKinley is that he had the good sense to get himself shot! Teddy's the most popular president since Washington.

Elihu Root, Secretary of War: Why drag in Washington?

John Hay: Ah, you know it and I know it, but that damned cowboy doesn't know it. What he wants is some issue to hang his campaign on – something to arouse the populace.

Sen. Henry Cabot Lodge: Cavalry charge?

John Hay: So to speak.

Dialogue 5

Capt. Jerome, USMC: Captain Jerome, United States Marine Corps, and you are my prisoner, sir.

The Bashaw (Emir) of Tangier: You are a very dangerous man, Captain, and your President Roosevelt is mad.

Capt. Jerome, USMC (with a huge smile): Yes, sir!

Although all this dialogue is fabricated for the film, Roosevelt did try to get Britain and France to join the US in a combined military action to rescue Perdicaris, but both countries refused. France actually reinforced its garrison in anticipation of an American assault and possible interference with their plans for a Protectorate. All three governments put pressure on the Sultan to accept Raisuli's demands, which he agreed to do on June 21, 1904. Hay then issued a statement to the Republican National Convention:

"This government wants Perdicaris alive or Raisuli dead." These remarks made Convention delegates give a wild cheer although they had been lukewarm towards Roosevelt up until then. One Kansas delegate exclaimed, *"Roosevelt and Hay know what they're doing. Our people like courage. We'll stand for anything those men do,"*

The film, already a travesty of real history, goes to even more absurd lengths – a pitched battle between U.S. Marines to free Raisuly from captivity at Ellen's request and a large German contingent of the Kaiser's best troops. They are led by a cavalry captain who looks

like the spitting image of everybody's World War II concept of a Nazi fanatic. Apparently writer and director Milius realized he had to find some redeeming scene to make American viewers feel some pride in the American military.

There is little doubt that the agenda of the film makers, director and producer was to make American involvement in a "foreign adventure" of the type approved in Korea but a disaster in Vietnam would never be repeated. Reaching back in history to this 1904 incident afforded fertile ground for Hollywood to convey a message in 1975 that was not lost on the many opponents of American intervention in Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan, and supporters of the anti-Israel rhetoric that turns the Palestinian Arabs into victims and both glorifies and romanticizes the culture of Islam. Cinematic efforts to portray Raisuly as a patriot or hero cannot cover up the reality of today's chaos and fragmentation that reign today in Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Libya, Sinai and the Palestinian territories. In all these real life situations there is no effective state control, no law and order and rival militias battle each other, take hostages and commit barbarous acts which no Hollywood scenario can disguise.

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