

Man behind anti-Islam film 'Innocence of Muslims' arrested in Los Angeles

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LOS ANGELES (RNS) The Egyptian-American man reportedly behind the anti-Islamic video that sparked weeks of Muslim protests worldwide was arrested and detained here Thursday (Sept. 27) over a federal probation violation.

Nakoula Basseley Nakoula, a 55-year-old Coptic Christian and onetime gas station owner, was placed in federal custody by U.S. Central District Chief Magistrate Judge Suzanne Segal over eight alleged probation violations stemming from his 2010 check fraud conviction.

Nakoula's probation violations include use of aliases and lying to probation officers; with new charges, he may serve another two years on top of the 21 months he served after the 2010 fraud conviction. Nakoula also had been barred in that case from going online or using computers for five years without probation officer approval.

Nakoula has said that he was the producer of the film, "Innocence of Muslims," which depicts Islam's Prophet Muhammad as a child-molesting, adulterous fraud. Muslims worldwide have protested the film since a trailer posted on YouTube was broadcast in Egypt.

As the controversy erupted, Nakoula first told reporters he was a Jewish real estate

agent named "Sam Bacile." Now imprisoned until his next federal hearing, Nakoula had been in hiding since the onset of protests Sept. 11.

"I think his fraud finally caught up to him," said Salam Al-Marayati, president of the Los Angeles-based Muslim Public Affairs Council. "His fraudulence in terms of trying to impersonate someone who is Jewish, he was fraudulent in calling it a film when it wasn't even a film, and he was fraudulent with the actors who were involved."

The few American Muslim protests against the film, including one in Dearborn, Mich., last Friday, have been peaceful. "We don't want any harm to Mr. Nakoula, we'll let the authorities handle him," he said. "He has the right to spout hatred."

Coptic Christian leaders have denounced the American Copts reportedly behind the film.