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The Clarion Project's Advisory Board Plays Fantasy Islam - Part 1: Zuhdi Jasser: Islam's Modernizing Prophet

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Mohamed Zuhdi Jasser performing Umrah in "Muslims Only" Mecca

Dr. Stephen M. Kirby

Fantasy Islam: A game in which an audience of non-Muslims wish with all their hearts that Islam was a "Religion of Peace," and a Muslim strives to fulfill that wish by presenting a personal version of Islam that has little foundation in Islamic Doctrine.

The [Clarion Project](#) has an interesting website to visit. Here is what Clarion says about itself:

Founded in 2006, Clarion Project (formerly Clarion Fund Inc) is an independently funded, non-profit organization dedicated to exposing the dangers of Islamist extremism while providing a platform for the voices of moderation and promoting grassroots activism.

The Clarion Project has an Advisory Board consisting of three Muslims: Zuhdi Jasser, Raheel Raza, and Elham Manea. The Clarion site explains:

The purpose of The Clarion Project's Advisory Board is to advise management how to best achieve the organization's goals of educating the public about Islamic extremism and providing a platform for Muslim human rights activists.

What kind of "education" will the Clarion Project's management be receiving from these three advisors? Let's start out with Zuhdi Jasser. According to the Clarion Project:

M. [Mohammed] Zuhdi Jasser, M.D. is the Founder and President of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy (AIFD). A devout Muslim, Dr. Jasser founded AIFD in the wake of the 9/11 attacks on the United States as an effort to provide an American Muslim voice advocating for the preservation of the founding principles of the United States Constitution, liberty and freedom, through the separation of mosque and state.

Jasser has been playing Fantasy Islam for many years. In 2015, in my first article about Fantasy Islam ([The Lure of Fantasy Islam](#)) Jasser was one of the Muslims I looked at. In that article I showed that Jasser believed that Islam could pretty much be whatever the individual Muslim wanted it to be, in spite of the teachings of Jasser's prophet Muhammad. Jasser arbitrarily dismissed disconcerting teachings of Muhammad and decided that certain uncomfortable verses of the Koran applied only to the 7th Century or needed to be reinterpreted a la Jasser.

Jasser was also one of the "founding authors" of the Muslim Reform Movement, a small group of Muslim "reformers" [I wrote about](#) who also play Fantasy Islam and have to rely on the non-Muslim world to help them "reform" Islam. But there is even more to Jasser's Fantasy Islam.

The Third Jihad

In 2008 we saw the release of the widely-acclaimed "documentary" titled The Third Jihad: Radical Islam's Vision for America. It was narrated by Zuhdi Jasser and distributed by the then-Clarion Fund; it was advertised as being the result of Jasser's investigation into Radical Islam. The documentary opened with this reassuring statement:

This is not a film about Islam. It is about the threat of radical Islam.

The phrase "Radical Islam" was actually just one of the terms Jasser used to identify the "enemy." Throughout the documentary he also referred to "Islamists" and "Political Islam." However, the closest he came to defining any of these terms was when he talked about "Wahhabism, which is the radical Saudi brand of Islam" (28:25). This was in the context of a 2005 study done by the Center for Religious Freedom, and here is what Jasser had to say:

The study found that much of the official Saudi-supplied literature they found in American mosques contained texts and teachings that could be considered hate speech against non-Muslims. One such example reads "Never greet the Christian or Jew first." And then it goes on to say, hate them for their religion and oppose them in every way according to Islamic law.

What Jasser failed to mention about "Never greet the Christian or Jew first" was that this was actually a command from his prophet Muhammad:

Abu Huraira reported that Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) had said: Do not greet the Jews and the Christians before they greet you and when you meet any one of them on the roads force him to go to the narrowest part of it.

Sahih Muslim, Vol. 6, No. 2167, p. 439

In terms of "hate them for their religion," the Koran states that Jews are among the worst enemies of Muslims (5:82), Muslims are specifically commanded to fight Jews and Christians (9:29), and the adherents of those two religions are not only cursed by Allah (9:30), but they are among the worst of creatures who are destined for Hell (98:6). And these just scratch the surface of the hate Islamic Doctrine expresses towards Jews and Christians.

Jasser then talked about the "hate speech" found in a textbook in a Saudi-funded Muslim school in Northern Virginia (30:00):

An example is from a twelfth grade Koranic interpretation that says it's permissible to kill an adulterer or a convert who left the faith.

At the time of this narration by Jasser, the following statement was being shown on the screen:

[To shed] the blood of a Muslim man...shall not be permissible except in three cases: soul for soul; adultery; and he who renounces his faith and abandon[sic] the community.

But again, Jasser failed to mention that this "hate speech" is actually supported by Islamic Doctrine. The death penalty for adultery was commanded by Muhammad (see below), and Muhammad ordered many an adulterer to be stoned to death.

In 4:89 of the Koran Allah commands Muslims to take hold of apostates who have left Islam and "kill them wherever you find them." Muhammad even said that such apostates were to be beheaded (Al-

Muwatta of Imam Malik ibn Anas, 36.18.15).

With regard to the above statement about the "blood of a Muslim man" and allowing the killing of adulterers and apostates, this is actually a statement from Muhammad that has been reported in numerous authoritative hadith collections (e.g., Sahih Al-Bukhari, Vol. 9, No. 6878, p. 20; Sahih Muslim, Vol. 5, No. 1676, pp. 118-119; and Sunan Ibn Majah, Vol. 3, Nos. 2533-2535, pp. 451-453).

Jasser continued his criticism of Saudi influence by looking at college campuses (32:00):

Many of the Saudi-funded courses profess the noble aim of bridging the gap between Islam and Christianity. But this is absurd when one considers that there isn't even one church in all of Saudi Arabia, and that it's an offense for a non-Muslim to even set foot in Mecca, Islam's holiest city.

Such actions by the Saudis should not be surprising, because before he died Muhammad prohibited Christianity from being allowed to remain on the Arabian Peninsula (e.g. Sahih Muslim, Vol. 5, No. 1767, p. 189). And in 9:28 of the Koran, Allah states that non-Muslims (including Christians) are "impure" and not allowed to be in Mecca.

In reality, The Third Jihad is about Islam.

Jasser and Saudi Arabia

In 2013 Jasser took a pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia. This was not the Hajj, but it was the less formal Umrah. Jasser travelled as a member of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), and had arrived before his delegation so he could visit Mecca. The [article](#) about this trip reported an interesting claim by Jasser:

Because of his criticism of Islam as practiced by Saudi Arabia, Jasser doubts that he would have been able to travel there, were it not on a diplomatic passport from the USCIRF.

As we are seeing in this article, and saw in [The Lure of Fantasy Islam](#), the Islam Jasser criticizes is not "radical/political Islam" or "Islamism." What Jasser is criticizing is the Islam found in the Koran, and taught and practiced by Jasser's prophet Muhammad. Consequently, it would be a good bet to say that the Saudis consider Jasser to be an apostate.

Following Muhammad's Example, Sometimes

Jasser's approach to Fantasy Islam is well illustrated in the following statement he made in his book *A Battle for the Soul of Islam* (p. 253):

My interpretation of the Qur'an has always included the overriding idea that the Prophet Muhammad's example, spiritually and morally, is for all times – but that his political and military actions were an example that cannot be taken out of the context of the times in which he lived and its specific conflicts.

As I had pointed out in [The Lure of Fantasy Islam](#), this statement is immediately repudiated by 33:21 of the Koran:

Indeed in the Messenger of Allah (Muhammad) you have a good example to follow for him who hopes for (the Meeting with) Allah and the Last Day, and remembers Allah much.

There are no limitations here on the areas in which Muhammad is to be considered a good example. In fact, 33:21 was actually "revealed" as a result of Muhammad's military leadership and the example he set for his Muslim warriors during the Battle of the Trench in 627 (e.g. Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Vol. 7, p. 658; and Tafsir Al-Jalalayn, p. 900).

But Jasser goes beyond ignoring 33:21. On p. 234 of his book, he asked

what about the idea of reforming those aspects of sharia law – such as stonings, blasphemy, apostasy, sexism – so that it can more accurately reflect the present day?

Sharia Law is Islamic Sacred Law based on the Koran and the teachings of Muhammad. So not only is Jasser talking about the need to reform (modernize) certain aspects of Islamic sacred law, but he is contradicting what he wrote on p. 253 (quoted above), in which he said Muhammad's spiritual and moral example was "for all times." Let's take a quick look at stoning and apostasy.

Muhammad spoke about stoning being "the order of God" and that he was the first to revive its practice for adulterers (The Life of Muhammad (Sirat Rasul Allah), p. 267). Stoning is obviously a moral matter.

Apostasy was a spiritual matter, having nothing to do with politics or the military, and, as pointed out above, both Allah and Muhammad said apostates should be killed.

So for Jasser, his prophet's spiritual and moral examples are "for all times," except when Jasser comes across some aspect of Islamic Sacred Law that he wants to modernize. A few years ago Jasser [summed it up](#) well:

There is a dire need for moderates to reinterpret the Qur'an and Hadith and dismiss ideas or sira not commensurate with modernity...others may view this as heresy or marginal thought in Islam. I would disagree, but also admit that it is not predominant among the thought leaders of Sunni Islam.

So Jasser strives to "reinterpret" the foundations of Islam using the nebulous concept of "modernity," and not the commands of Allah and the teachings of Muhammad, as the standard. This is truly Fantasy Islam.

In Part 2 we will look at the second Muslim on the Clarion Project's Advisory Board: Raheel Raza.

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