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Zuhdi Jasser Refuses to Debate in His Home Mosque: Keeping the House of Cards Together

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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.

These are interesting times! Over the last couple of years I have written a number of articles about Zuhdi Jasser and the Muslim Reform Movement (MRM), an organization Jasser helped found (articles [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). In these articles I pointed out how Jasser and the MRM folks flouted established Islamic Doctrine and created their own personalized versions of Islam, which I referred to as Fantasy Islam. And in [another article](#) I explained why these aspiring Muslim "reformers" were doomed to failure.

A few days ago Jasser started publicly responding. On his [Blaze radio program](#), in an [interview with Glenn Beck](#), and in [his writings](#), Jasser engaged in tirades of sweeping accusatory statements and ad-hominem attacks. The targets of his tirades consisted of a small number of non-Muslims that he called the "Alt-Jihad." Included in Jasser's group of "Alt-Jihadists" were Andrew Bostom, Pamela Geller, Carl Goldberg, John Guandolo, Claire Lopez, Robert Spencer, Diana West, and me. I am honored to be in such impressive company. According to Jasser the purpose of the "Alt-Jihadists" is to essentially undermine the efforts of Muslim "reformers" like himself.

For years Jasser and I have disagreed about the nature of Islam and the prospects for "reforming" it. So in response to his recent tirades, on March 13th I posted the below proposal on Jasser's [Blaze radio program](#) site; on March 15th I used the Contact Page at Jasser's [American Islamic Forum for Democracy](#) site to send him this same proposal:

"Dr. Jasser, I propose we have a debate. I will argue that Islam is that which is found in the Koran, taught by Muhammad and reported in hadith collections, biographies/histories, and Koran commentaries by Muslim scholars who have been considered authoritative by other Muslim scholars for well over 1,000 years. You will argue that you personally have the authority and/or ability to reinterpret Islamic Doctrine according to your own opinion, even if it goes against Islamic Doctrine that has been considered authoritative since the time of Muhammad. The location will be the mosque that you attend, with the audience consisting only of Muslims from that mosque and their Muslim guests. I look forward to your reply. Sincerely, Stephen Kirby."

As of March 22nd I have not heard back from Jasser.

Jasser's lack of response to my debate proposal leads to some interesting conclusions. First, I believe he thinks such a debate in his home mosque would continue the chain of events showing how little support he and his "reform" efforts have in the Muslim-American community. Consider the following:

1. In April 2004 Jasser organized a "Rally against Terror" in Phoenix, Arizona as a way of showing Muslim condemnation of jihadist terrorism. In an [article](#) written shortly after that event, Daniel Pipes noted that there were an estimated 50,000 Muslims in the Phoenix area, but only 30-100 Muslims

actually showed up for the rally. Pipes concluded, "One correspondent of mine judged the event 'a total disaster.'"

2. While on a [panel discussion](#) in 2010 Jasser talked about modernizing Islam and admitted that his views were, at best, in the minority. Here is what he said:

"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."

3. In February 2011 a New York Times [article](#) described Jasser as "a doctor from Arizona and an American military veteran who has little following among Muslims but has become a favorite of conservatives for his portrayal of American Muslim leaders as radical Islamists."

4. In 2012 the United States Senate appointed Jasser to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. An NBC News [article](#) written shortly afterwards noted that "a coalition of 64 groups representing American Muslim lawyers, students, Arab Americans and mosques and an array of advocacy organizations called on the legislators to rescind the naming of Jasser – a controversial figure who many American Muslims see as a shill for anti-Muslim bigots."

5. In 2015 Jasser [claimed](#) that while attending his mosque in Scottsdale, Arizona, the imam of that mosque had accused him of being an Islamophobe and speaking ill against Muslims.

6. The creation of the MRM, with Jasser among its leadership, was announced with fanfare in December 2015. On the one year anniversary of the MRM Jasser announced that the group's "greatest accomplishment to date" was the two page declaration laying out the MRM's beliefs. As I pointed out in a previous [article](#), this declaration was rejected by over 99% of the mosques and individual Muslims to whom it had been sent for review.

Consequently, I believe Jasser feels that our debate in his home mosque, instead of giving him a "home-field" advantage, would instead result in another public display of how little support he has in the Muslim-American community.

Secondly, Jasser's lack of response shows where he is most comfortable. For many years Jasser has made numerous appearances on non-Muslim television and radio stations, and numerous presentations to non-Muslim audiences. The common denominator, with a few exceptions, is that these are non-Muslims who generally know very little, if anything about Islam and consequently think his "reform" ideas are viable. I do not recall Jasser talking about any presentations at mosques or in front of Muslim groups, other than small groups of fellow Muslim "reformers." It would appear then that Jasser is most comfortable when talking about Islam in front of non-Muslims who, for the most part, know little if anything about Islam and would be unlikely to ask knowledgeable, probing questions about his version of Islam.

So unfortunately it should come as no surprise that Jasser has not responded to my proposal for a debate. His Fantasy Islam does not go over well in the Muslim-American community. On the other hand, he has been quite successful in touting his Fantasy Islam to non-Muslims who don't know much about Islam. Why interrupt success for almost certain failure?

Dr. Stephen M. Kirby is the author of four books about Islam. His latest book is *Islam's Militant Prophet: Muhammad and Forced Conversions to Islam*.

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