

Blaming the Jews for the inability to reform Islam

Zuhdi Jasser is a reformer aspiring for relevance, but his efforts are in vain, because real Islam is impossible to reform. Op-ed.

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KoranISTOCK

Dr. Zuhdi Jasser, aspiring reformer and modernizer of Islam, founder of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy, and one of the founders of the Muslim Reform Movement, recently wrote an article in the *White Rose* magazine in which he maintained that those like him who are aspiring to reform and modernize Islam are being held back by Jewish leaders in the United States.^[1]

In this article Jasser noted:

...some of our most significant obstacles...come from within the Jewish community.

If any of us reformers are going to ever make any headway at all, then the leadership of leading Jewish political and religious organizations must make strategic alliances with – eyes wide open, please [sic?]. The importance of those alliances cannot be overstated as it provides important legitimacy to American Muslim groups domestically and abroad.

My goal here is simple. It is to shed the antiseptic of sunlight upon the relationships that many Jewish organizations make with American Islamists...In fact, the elevation of Islamists by any leading non-Muslims in the West is just another nail in the coffin of reformers.

Understanding this inextricable connection between the demonization of Jews and the advancement of Islamist movements... is essential in order to break the link and finally give reformers the space to even begin the hard work of reforming various Muslim interpretations of the faith of Islam...And yet, it breaks my heart to see so many in the Jewish community itself actively hampering and preventing such a positive change from occurring.

Except for notable exceptions due to how rarely they happen, larger groups like the ADL have sat on the sidelines as American Islamist groups born out of the Muslim Brotherhood have radicalized American Muslims and poisoned the discourse against reformist groups like the Muslim Reform Movement.

That the Jewish community does not confront the scourge of Muslim anti-Semitism also makes it more challenging for those few Muslim imams, scholars, or activists with the courage to publicly take on the anti-Semitism of Islamist leaders. When these brave reformers arise, instead of being embraced by their Jewish brothers and sisters, they are either silenced, or not given sufficient attention or support.

On the face of it, it appears strange that Jasser places such emphasis on non-Muslim support to ensure the viability of the Muslim Reform Movement and aspiring Muslim reformers. However, Jasser's focus on such non-Muslim support has existed for many years, and for a reason.

His realization that the support of non-Muslims was necessary in the effort to reform Islam might have first taken place as a result of a rally he held in 2004. 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]

A few years later, while on a panel discussion in 2010, Jasser emphasized the importance of non-Muslim support in the effort to reform Islam:

I do hope readers leave here, however, understanding that not only does the solution need to come from devout Muslims within the "House of Islam", but we all desperately need to develop a coherent, coordinated, and constructive domestic and international strategy to defeat political Islam...Therefore, it stands to reason that all intellectuals in the west should do whatever they can to facilitate the authentic and moderate Muslim allies of the United States who are working tirelessly to break down those obstacles. [3]

Jasser's focus on non-Muslim support is understandable as over the years Muslim support for his reform efforts continued to be negligible.

For example, 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 May 2011, Ahmed Banna, then, and currently, CAIR chapter president in Cleveland, Ohio, and Jasser's father-in-law, said this about Jasser:

"His group is not really well-known among American Muslims, and the reason is himself, when he's standing up in the media and attacking Muslim organizations," Banna said of his son-in-law. "It's not making him popular among the Muslim community." [5]

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. [\[6\]](#)

In May 2015, a reporter for an Arizona publication talked with Jasser and wrote:

Jasser says he has been ostracized from the mainstream Muslim community because of his views. [\[7\]](#)

In December 2015, in a [Phoenix New Times](#) newspaper article, 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. The article also pointed out that:

...large Muslim organizations in this country label him an “Islamophobe,” deride him as a Muslim ‘Uncle Tom,’ Fox News’ go-to Muslim, who helps anti-Muslim bigots paint all devotees of Islam with the broad brush of stereotypes. [\[8\]](#)

Also in December 2015, Jasser joined with a small group of “Muslim reformers” in Washington DC to discuss the reform of Islam. They stated that they were “Muslims who live in the 21st century” who were “in a battle for the soul of Islam.” They proclaimed that they stood for “a respectful, merciful and inclusive interpretation of Islam.” They called their meeting the Summit of Western Muslim Voices of Reform and named themselves the Muslim Reform Movement (MRM). On December 4, 2015, fourteen “founding authors” from this movement signed the two-page Declaration for Muslim Reform, laying out their beliefs. [\[9\]](#)

As I noted in an article I wrote shortly after this event, the MRM’s Declaration rejected Muhammad’s Islam in favor of Western, Judeo-Christian values. [\[10\]](#)

The MRM was up and running. But how well was it received in the American Muslim community? According to Jasser, it was not well received, even from the beginning.

On January 30, 2017, Jasser was interviewed in an article about the MRM’s recent one year anniversary: [\[11\]](#) Jasser was asked about how many mosques the MRM

had approached for support in 2015, and the nature of the responses from those mosques. Jasser's answer was eye-opening; he replied:

We spent significant resources on this outreach over a period of ten months. We reached out through snail mail, e-mail, and telephone to over 3,000 mosques and over 500 known public American Muslims. We received only 40-plus rather dismissive responses from our outreach, and sadly less than ten of them were positive. In fact, one mosque in South Carolina left us a vicious voice mail threatening our staff if we contacted them again.

So MRM made over 3,500 contacts within the Muslim community, but received only a little over 40 responses, of which *less than ten* were positive. So to work with these numbers, let's say the MRM made 3,500 contacts and received nine positive responses. That means that only .0026 (a touch over one-quarter of one percent) of the Muslim organizations and Muslim individuals the MRM contacted responded in a positive manner.

The lack of success of the MRM was further revealed when Jasser was asked about the MRM's accomplishments during the first year of its existence. Jasser stated:

Our greatest accomplishment to date is our declaration.

As mentioned above, the MRM's declaration is a two-page document that rejected Muhammad's Islam in favor of Western, Judeo-Christian values, and in terms of Islamic Doctrine the Declaration is rife with blasphemy.

Jasser also admitted that after a year of the MRM's existence "*...we are disappointed in the relative silence from most Muslim leaders...*"

Instead of considering the effect on Muslim leaders of the rejection of established Islamic Doctrine by the MRM's Declaration, Jasser blamed a lack of funding for the lack of support from the Muslim community:

I can guess why we had shortcomings in outreach. If we had more funding, we could study this more scientifically...No one knows truly how that majority of Muslims feels about Islamist ideologies. National security is in desperate need of helping us study that. ...We have not been able to effectively reach out to the majority of Muslims because of resources and the absence of effective platforms.

So for Jasser, a lack of funding seemed to be the major factor in the MRM's lack of success in the Muslim community.^[12] And with the lack of support in the Muslim community, this funding would by necessity have to come largely from the non-Muslim community. But lack-of-funding was soon to be replaced by another reason for that lack of success, and it involved non-Muslims.

A little over one month later, in March 2017, Jasser attributed the lack of success by the MRM to non-Muslim "alt-jihadists."^[13] Here is some of what Jasser said about "alt-jihadists":

Alt-jihadists are non-Muslim thought leaders who are defined by two characteristics. Regardless of their intentions, first, they view Islam as a terminal monolith, a supremacist political ideology leaving no room for a distinction between the faith of Islam and Islamism. Second, they universally dismiss and vilify anti-Islamist reformers not as Uncle Toms but essentially similarly calling them 'liars' and 'illegitimate.' Alt-jihadists take it upon themselves to excommunicate anti-Islamist reformers from their monolithic version of Islam.

The alt-jihad consists of non-Muslims who refuse to leave room for even the remote possibility of branding Islam and any faithful Muslims into modernity. The alt-jihad is simple, simplistic, self-serving, and dangerous. It attempts to deny Muslim dissidents any space, hope, or support whatsoever we so urgently need to make headway. Their parroting of Islamist tyrannical rhetoric and their slash-and-burn approach only strengthens the hold Islamist extremists have on Muslim communities...

Alt-jihadists live in a world where truth and intellectual credibility are optional. They have one purpose: to obstruct any hope or path towards a solution within the House of Islam.

I was prominently mentioned in this article, with Jasser claiming that I had a "Wahhabi sharia court." And he also mentioned other "alt-jihadists," for example:

But who needs an Iranian or Saudi Islamist Supreme Council of Inquisition when we have Stephen Kirby (July 2015, Dec 2015), Diana West (2012), Robert Spencer, and others to dismiss reformist dissenters inside the House of Islam as illegitimate Muslims?

So Jasser first blamed a lack of money from non-Muslims, and then non-Muslim "alt-jihadists" for the failure of the MRM and other aspiring Muslim reformers.

And in less than a year, in February 2018, Jasser was blaming the non-Muslim Southern Poverty Law Center for “basically doing the work to silence and marginalize the authenticity of the voices of Muslim reform.” [14]

Now he is blaming American Jews for the lack of success of the MRM and aspiring Muslim reformers.

Conclusion

As we have seen, for many years Jasser, and apparently the other aspiring Muslim reformers, have largely been rejected by the greater Muslim community. This has required Jasser and the others to turn to the non-Muslim community for support. So the continued lack of progress by these reformers in reforming and modernizing Islam has been blamed on the lack of support by certain non-Muslim individuals and organizations, and the hostility of the non-Muslim “alt-jihadists.”

However, the reality is that the overall failure of the aspiring reformers and the MRM is neither caused by the lack of funds from, or the lack of support by non-Muslims, nor by the perceived existence of antipathy toward reformers among non-Muslims. It is rather the fault of what these aspiring reformers are trying to do in terms of reforming and modernizing Islam, a goal which is unattainable:

1. They create their own versions of Islam, relying on their own personal opinions and interpretations, and arbitrarily dismissing parts of Islamic history and centuries of established Muslim scholarship that they wish omit.
2. They claim to follow the Koran, while ignoring selected Koran verses and providing their personal interpretations for others, regardless of how these verses have been understood by Muslim scholars over the centuries.
3. They claim to follow the teachings of Muhammad, while ignoring selected teachings that are problematic for the modern liberal.
4. They personally decide which teachings of Muhammad are authentic, arbitrarily dismissing centuries of established Muslim scholarship about these teachings.
5. As a result, their beliefs are considered heretical. And as Muhammad said, every heresy sends one to the Fires of Hell. [15]

6. Because these reformers are seen as heretics, they have little, if any support for their attempted reforms in the greater Muslim community in the United States and elsewhere.

7. Consequently, the reformers have nobody to appeal to but non-Muslims in order to help them reform Islam.

8. So what are the chances of success for Muslim heretics and their non-Muslim followers to change Islam from that which was commanded by Allah and taught by Muhammad, to that which is advocated by the heretic? Zero.^[16]

If these aspiring Muslim reformers disagree with my conclusion and want to claim relevance, it needs to be measured not by the extent of their support from the non-Muslim world, but rather by how many mosques in which they make their presentations and the percentage of Muslims they bring to their cause.

[1] M. Zuhdi Jasser, "Jewish Leaders Must Counter Islamist Supremacism," *White Rose*, Issue VIII, Spring 2022, <https://whiterosemagazine.com/jewish-leaders-must-counter-islamist-supremacism/>.

[2] Robert Spencer, "Moderate Muslims March in Phoenix," *Jihad Watch*, May 1, 2004, <https://robertspencer.org/2004/05/moderate-muslims-march-in-phoenix>.

[3] Jamie Glazov, "Symposium: The World's Most Wanted: A 'Moderate Islam,'" *Frontpage Mag*, May 26, 2010, p. 14, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YFo00jGhIWK9x8R7bsSdRh_ZVpWYiyeD/view?usp=sharing.

[4] Laurie Goodstein, "Muslims to Be Congressional Hearings' Main Focus," *The New York Times*, February 7, 2011, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/08/us/politics/08muslim.html?_r=1&ref=politics.

[5] Omar Sacirbey, "Muslims battle to be official voice of U.S. Islam," *The Washington Post*, May 20, 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/muslims-battle-to-be-official-voice-of-us-islam/2011/05/17/AFDZx07G_story.html.

[6] "U.S. rights appointee Zuhdi Jasser hits raw nerve for American Muslims," *NBC News*, April 12, 2012, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/u-s-rights-appointee-zuhdi-jasser-hits-raw-nerve-american-flna713727>.

[7] Leah Lemoine, "Knowing Islam," *Phoenix*, May 1, 2015, <https://www.phoenixmag.com/2015/05/01/knowing-islam/>.

[8] Stephen Lemons, "Muslim Phoenix Doctor Seeks to Save America and Islam from ISIS-Inspired Extremists," *Phoenix New Times*, December 9, 2015, <http://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/news/muslim-phoenix-doctor-seeks-to-save-america-and-islam-from-isis-inspired-extremists-7881682>.

[9] <https://muslimreformmovement.org/first-page-posts/declaration/>.

[10] Stephen M. Kirby, "The Muslim Reform Movement Plays Fantasy Islam," *Frontpage Mag*, December 10, 2015, <https://archives.frontpagemag.com/fpm/muslim-reform-movement-plays-fantasy-islam-dr-stephen-m-kirby/>.

[11] Steve Postal, "A Muslim Reformer Speaks Out About His Battle Against Islamism And PC," *The Federalist*, January 30, 2017, <https://thefederalist.com/2017/01/30/muslim-reformer-speaks-battle-islamism-pc/>.

[12] From my article "Muslim Reform Group Reached Out to 3,000 US Mosques, Got Only 40 Responses," *Jihad Watch*, February 24, 2017, <https://robertspencer.org/2017/02/muslim-reform-group-reached-out-to-3000-us-mosques-got-only-40-responses>.

[13] M. Zuhdi Jasser, "There's An Emerging 'Alt-Jihad' Movement In The U.S., But It's Not Muslims Who Are Pushing It...", *Independent Journal Review*, March 15, 2017, <https://www.mzuhdijasser.com/19792/alt-jihad-movement>.

[14] Tyler O'Neil, "Zuhdi Jasser: SPLC 'Facilitates Global Jihad' of Islamist Theocrats and ISIS," *PJ Media*, February 24, 2018, <https://pjmedia.com/news-and-politics/tyler-o-neil/2018/02/24/zuhdi-jasser-splc-facilitates-global-jihad-of-islamist-theocrats-and-isis-n56439>.

[15] Abu al-Fida' 'Imad Ad-Din Isma'il bin 'Umar bin Kathir al-Qurashi Al-Busrawi, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* (Abridged), abr. Shaykh Safiur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri,

trans. Jalal Abualrub, et al. (Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 2000), Vol. 2, p. 588:

The most truthful speech is Allah's Speech, and the best guidance is the guidance of Muhammad. The worst matters are the newly invented (in religion), every newly invented matter is an innovation, and every innovation is a heresy, and every heresy is in the Fire.

[16] For more information about this, see my article "Why Americanized Muslim Reformers are Failing," *Frontpage Mag*, November 12, 2015, <https://archives.frontpagemag.com/fpm/why-americanized-muslim-reformers-are-failing-dr-stephen-m-kirby/>.